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Seventy-third year

Provisional

8293rd meeting
Monday, 25 June 2018, 11 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Vershinin/Mr. Nebenzia/Mr. Safronkov	(Russian Federation)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Soliz
	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Djédjé
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Esono Mbengono
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Peru	Mr. Tenya
	Poland	Mr. Lewicki
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Mr. Cohen

Agenda

Maintenance of international peace and security

Comprehensive review of the situation in the Middle East and North Africa

Letter dated 1 June 2018 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the SecretaryGeneral (S/2018/524)

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The meeting was called to order at 11.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Maintenance of international peace and security

Comprehensive review of the situation in the Middle East and North Africa

Letter dated 1 June 2018 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the SecretaryGeneral (S/2018/524)

The President (*spoke in Russian*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Bahrain, Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Arab Republic, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. Maged Abdelfattah Abdelaziz, Permanent Observer for the League of Arab States to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

I propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine to the United Nations, to participate in the meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

I propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of the Holy See to the United Nations, to participate in the meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/524, which contains a letter dated 1 June 2018 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council, transmitting a concept paper on the item under consideration.

I now give the floor to the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. António Guterres.

The Secretary-General: I thank the Russian Federation presidency for convening this debate at a crucial juncture for the people of the Middle East and North Africa.

The region faces profound divisions, troubling currents and a tragic shredding of its diverse religious, ethnic and cultural fabric. Decades-old conflicts, together with new ones, as well as deep-rooted social grievances, a shrinking of democratic space and the emergence of terrorism and new forms of violent extremism are undermining peace, sustainable development and human rights. The territorial integrity of countries like Syria, Yemen and Libya is under threat. Millions of people have been forcibly displaced from their homes. The impacts of this instability have spread to neighbours and beyond.

In addressing these challenges, we would all do well to recall the series of Arab Human Development Reports issued by the United Nations Development Programme, starting in 2002. Those studies identified significant deficits in education, basic freedoms and empowerment, especially among the region's women and young people. Among the findings of the first report, in 2002, was:

> "Political participation in Arab countries remains weak, as manifested in the lack of genuine representative democracy and restrictions on liberties. At the same time, people's aspirations for more freedom and greater participation in decision-making have grown, fueled by rising incomes, education, and information flows. The mismatch between aspirations and their fulfilment has in some cases led to alienation and its offspring — apathy and discontent. Remedying this state of affairs must be a priority for national leaderships."

Many such shortfalls continue to bedevil societies across the region. Let us also recognize that many of today's problems are being compounded by the legacy of the past, including the colonial era and the consequences of the First World War, notably the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. The well-known peace to end all peace did, unfortunately, achieve that aim.

It was in this broad context that the Arab Spring reverberated widely as a call for inclusion, opportunity and the opening of political space. Here, I would like to pay tribute to the people of Tunisia, where the call began. They have achieved considerable progress in consolidating their young democracy, including through a new constitution and a peaceful transition of power.

But the Tunisia promise did not materialize everywhere in the region. Today, in a region once home to one of history's greatest flowerings of culture and coexistence, we see many fault lines at work, old and new, crossing each other and generating enormous volatility. These include the Israeli-Palestinian wound, resurgent Cold War-like rivalries, the Sunni-Shia divide, ethnic schisms and other political confrontations. Economic and social opportunities are also clearly insufficient. As such difficulties rise, trust in institutions declines. Societies fracture along ethnic or religious lines, which are being manipulated for political advantage. At times, foreign interference has exacerbated this disunity, with destabilizing effects. And the risk of further downward spirals is sky high.

Our most pressing peace and security challenges in the Middle East are a clear reflection of the rifts, pressures, neglect and long-term trends that have brought us to today's crossroads. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains central to the Middle Eastern quagmire. Achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting two-State solution that allows Palestinians and Israelis to live side-by-side in peace, within secure and recognized borders, is essential to security and stability in the entire region. The recent tensions and violence in Gaza are a reminder of the fragility of the present situation.

International support is critical to creating an environment conducive to launching meaningful direct negotiations between the two parties. I remain deeply committed to supporting efforts towards this end. Later today, I will preside over a pledging conference to address severe funding gaps facing the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

In Syria, civilians have borne a litany of atrocities for more than seven years of conflict: sieges, starvation, indiscriminate attacks, the use of chemical weapons, exile and forced displacement, sexual violence, torture, detention and enforced disappearances. Syria has also become a battleground for proxy wars among regional and international actors. Violence is entrenched amid a fractured political landscape and a multiplicity of armed groups. In the absence of trusted State institutions, many Syrians have fallen back on religious and tribal identities. I continue to call on the parties to the conflict to engage meaningfully with my Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, in the United Nations-facilitated political process in Geneva. I urge progress in the establishment of the constitutional committee.

Resolution 2254 (2015) remains the only internationally agreed avenue for a credible and sustainable end to the conflict. More than ever, our aim is to see a united and democratic Syria, to avoid irreparable sectarianism, to ensure full respect for Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and to enable the Syrian people to freely decide on the country's future.

Yemen is suffering a prolonged and devastating conflict with clear regional dimensions. My Special Envoy for Yemen, Martin Griffiths, has been actively engaged in order to avoid an escalation that could have dramatic humanitarian consequences. One week ago, he presented to the Council elements of a negotiation framework that he has been discussing with various interlocutors inside Yemen and in the region. Our hope is that this framework would allow for a resumption of badly needed political negotiations to put an end to the conflict.

In Gaza, Syria and Yemen, the international community must remain mobilized in order to ensure a strong humanitarian response to millions of people in dire need.

In Libya, the United Nations is committed to supporting national armed conflicttors to find a peaceful resolution to the crisis. The national conference process, organized as part of the United Nations Action Plan, is delivering a clear message that Libyans are longing for an end to the conflict and an end to the transition period. All stakeholders must continue lending their support to my Special Representative Ghassan Salamé as he leads the political process. Political success in Libya will also hopefully allow the country to play its role in addressing the dramatic plight of migrants and refugees who have been suffering so much in attempting to cross the Mediterranean.

In the past few years, we have witnessed numerous examples of Iraq's resilience, including overcoming

the risk of fragmentation and achieving victory over the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Iraq's endurance as a stable federal State is a testament to the enormous sacrifices of Iraqi people from all communities. I strongly hope that the Iraqi institutions will be able to ensure an adequate conclusion of the electoral process in a way that fully respects the will of the Iraqi people. In this context, the reconstruction of areas destroyed in the retaking of territory from ISIL is a priority, as is the safe, dignified and voluntary return of Iraq's displaced people to their homes, including those from religious minorities. It is also important to complement such efforts by ensuring that those who committed atrocity crimes are held accountable for their actions, in accordance with international standards.

Let us remember that what look like religious conflicts are normally the product of political or geostrategic manipulation, or proxies for other antagonisms. There are endless examples of different religious groups living together peacefully for centuries, despite their differences. Today's artificial divides therefore can and must be overcome, based on respect for the independence and territorial integrity of the countries concerned.

In this context, it is important to value the experience of respect for diversity that Lebanon today represents. In Lebanon, parliamentary elections — the first since 2009 — were held peacefully in May, underscoring the country's democratic tradition. We look forward to the formation of the new Government to further strengthen State institutions, promote structural reforms and implement the dissociation policy. Heightened regional tensions could threaten Lebanon's stability, including at the Blue Line. Steadfast international efforts remain critical in supporting Lebanon in consolidating State authority, safeguarding the country from regional tensions and hosting refugees until durable solutions are found, in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions.

I remain particularly concerned at the risks of destabilization around the Gulf. That is why I have always supported the efforts of the Kuwaiti mediation to overcome divisions among Arab States in the area. On the other hand, it is important to preserve the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, which should remain a valuable element of peace and security, independent of the wider discussion about the role of Iran in the region. During the Cold War, ideological rivals still found ways to talk and cooperate despite their deep divides, for example through the Helsinki process. I do not see why the countries of the region cannot find a similar platform to come together, drawing experience from one another and enhancing opportunities for possible political, environmental, socioeconomic or security forms of cooperation.

Regional and subregional organizations also have a key role to play in supporting preventive diplomacy, mediation and confidence-building. The region needs to ensure the integrity of the State, its governance systems and the equal application of the rule of law protecting all individuals. Majorities should not feel the existential threat of fragmentation, and minorities should not feel the threat of oppression and exile. And everyone, everywhere, should enjoy the right to live in dignity, freedom and peace. I call on the members of the Security Council to reach the much-needed consensus and to act with one strong voice.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation.

When we convened this meeting, we thought it very important to come up with united approaches to the problem of helping to resolve the crises quickly settling the crises in the vast expanse of the Near and Middle East and North Africa. We propose that together we reflect on what can be done today to stop people's suffering and avert other tragedies and shocks in one of the most turbulent parts of the world. We firmly believe, however, that any decisions we take will be effective only if two conditions are met. First, they must be truly collective, and secondly, they must be in keeping with the norms and principles of international law. Both analysis and experience have shown that lone attempts to cut the Gordian knot of these conflicts are doomed to failure. The flawed practice of unilateral action, when one State Member of the United Nations declares the Governments of other States Members to be pariahs, pursuing a policy of undermining or removing regimes it does not like, has not only not helped to resolve the region's numerous problems, it has created new ones. It is clear that if we are to reduce the potential for crisis, we must unite international and regional efforts, including in effective and inclusive formats and with the United Nations and its Security Council playing a

central role — I repeat, with the United Nations and its Security Council playing a leading role.

A genuine pooling of the efforts of all States to counter regional threats requires an honest partnership dialogue, and that dialogue must be founded on a rejection of attempts to resolve conflicts through force and on support for the good offices of the Secretary-General, regional organizations and individual Member States, without politicizing the humanitarian aspects of the issue and in full respect for obligations under international law and the Charter of the United Nations above all.

The Russian Federation advocates developing a positive and unifying agenda for the entire international community with a view to resolving the situation in the Near and Middle East and in North Africa, for which respect for the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the countries of the region is a crucial condition. It will be essential to work to present a truly broad front against the terrorist threat that still remains, despite the considerable successes we have already seen in Iraq and Syria. We must also put an end to use terrorist groups in the struggle for advantage in the new balance of Powers in the region. While it is important to work collectively to repel terrorism's use of chemical weapons and weapons of mass destruction, we should never play into the hands of such outlaws in their provocations with chemical weapons by using them as a pretext for acts of aggression.

It is unacceptable for anyone to exploit such provocations by making accusations about Governments they do not like, making it all the more difficult for the experts to establish the real facts. Attempts to introduce divisions in international organizations such as the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in no way contribute to the logic of a collective search for solutions, and neither did the unwillingness to support a Security Council draft resolution on improving the methods of work of the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism in Syria or the desire to assign functions to the OPCW that are not considered under the Convention on Chemical Weapons and that by their nature come under the Council's purview. Unfortunately, at the special session opening tomorrow of the Conference of the States Parties to Review the Operation of the Chemical Weapons Convention, we run the risk of seeing attempts to turn a technical body into an arena for political battles.

The keystone of our joint efforts in the region should be creating conditions conducive to strengthening a general climate of trust. This is crucial with regard to relations between the Arab States, Israel and Iran. Let us not forget that in its resolution 598 (1987), adopted in 1987, the Security Council charged the Secretary-General with working with regional stakeholders on measures to strengthen the security and stability of the region. This is obviously a complicated issue that requires discreet, painstaking discussions and a sensitive approach. But the work on it must begin, and we are ready to give all the help in our power by talking with our partners in Iran, Israel, Palestine, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Egypt, Turkey and other countries of the region.

The ultimate aim should be to establish a genuinely inclusive regional security architecture that would ensure the participation of every State in this part of the world. The first step here could be to hold a conference with the participation of the Gulf States to discuss issues of regional security. Obviously, that would require guarantees, above all from the permanent five members of the Security Council. Eventually such a conference could be expanded to other Middle Eastern countries.

It will also be important to take immediate steps to disseminate a culture of peace on an inter-ethnic and interreligious basis, which would help to prevent further ethno-religious strife. Depicting the conflicts in the region as religious clashes, including between Sunni and Shia, is extremely dangerous. It is clear that insisting on creating mono-religious societies not only contradicts modern realities, it is a way to ensure that the conflicts will drag on for years or even decades. The Russian Federation has unique experience in the area of the coexistence of ethnic and religious groups, and we therefore support the proposal of the Inter-Parliamentary Union to work with the United Nations to organize a world conference on interreligious and ethnic dialogue with the participation of Heads of State, parliamentarians and representatives of world religions. We would be prepared to host such a conference in Russia in 2022.

We are convinced that sending Security Council missions into conflict areas in the Middle East will help strengthen the Council's unity. In those areas and all others, Russia is ready to work together with interested partners in an open and impartial manner and without threats or negative pressure.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the members of the Security Council.

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): We thank the Russian presidency for organizing this important debate to allow us to discuss the situation in the Middle East and North Africa in a comprehensive manner. We are pleased to see you, Mr. Deputy Minister, presiding over this debate. We appreciate the concept paper (S/2018/524, annex) made available to us to facilitate the Council's debate on the topic.

We also thank Secretary-General António Guterres for his presence here today with us, as well as for his very useful presentation which helps put matters in their proper perspective. I want to thank the Secretary-General most earnestly for his very thoughtful and incisive analysis of the challenges of the region, which we must expect from the Head of the world body at a time when such frank analysis is so needed and has become indispensable.

The region of the Middle East and North Africa is facing multiple and complex challenges. Long-standing and unresolved disputes continue to fester, while, as indicated in the concept paper and highlighted by the Secretary-General, new conflict and crisis situations are also plaguing the entire region and causing horrendous suffering for millions of civilians. The increasing level of violence has created unprecedented humanitarian crises, forcing millions of people to be displaced.

With the further weakening of State institutions, terrorist organizations — including the Islamic State of Iraq and the Sham (ISIS), Al-Qaeda and others — criminal gangs and human traffickers have had the opportunity to exploit the political vacuum, further undermining State legitimacy. Who can forget that at one point not too long ago, the terrorist organization ISIS had managed to control a large area with a big population and almost assumed the attributes of a State? Never had the continuing weaknesses of international cooperation in counter-terrorism been as glaringly plain as they were at that time. That could be possible in this day and age was telling and also helped to underscore the extent to which the challenges faced by the region are very complex and potentially extremely dangerous and have the potential to cause wider and expanding conflict.

The repeated use of chemical weapons in the region is also undermining the global non-proliferation architecture. The future of the Iran nuclear deal, which was signed after a long and arduous negotiation, is under threat, with serious implications for regional and indeed international peace and security. Of course, we all know the geostrategic importance of the wider region. The current dynamics have not helped, but rather have intensified geopolitical rivalries, further complicating efforts aimed at finding solutions to the many challenges and threats facing the region. The conflict and crisis situations plaguing the region have also undermined hard-won development gains, exacerbating socioeconomic challenges, including high youth unemployment, leading to inequality, a sense of frustration and alienation. Furthermore, they have aggravated sectarian divisions and tensions, destroying centuries-old social fabrics.

All these have been eloquently stressed by the Secretary-General, and they underscore the need for a comprehensive and holistic approach to addressing the political, security, socioeconomic and humanitarian challenges of the region. That is why we find this debate very timely and appropriate, as it allows us to look at the situation from a broader perspective, rather than considering issues in isolation, and we appreciate, as already indicated, the concept note shared with us to guide our discussion in this regard.

We have no illusion that there are any easy solutions to resolve the long-standing and unresolved disputes, as well as the new conflict and crisis situations in the region. However, there is one thing that we believe is true, and we think it broadly applies to all the difficult issues in the region, without discounting the varying nature and context of each conflict situation. Unless there are genuine and meaningful dialogue and negotiation among the various parties, which should be complemented by the constructive engagement of concerned countries in the region, and indeed, the major Powers, achieving a peaceful and comprehensive political settlement will continue to be unachievable. We know this is easier said than done, but there is no other sane option than this to resolve conflicts, diffuse tensions, create trust and address anxieties and fears among communities and States in the region.

That is why we support all diplomatic efforts being exerted through the good offices of the Secretary-General and his special representatives and envoys operating on the ground. In that regard, it must be

stressed that no matter what we do to contribute to peace and security in that region or elsewhere, unless those efforts are guided by and anchored in commitment to the principles of international law governing inter-State relations, which essentially means adherence to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, it is definitely unlikely that we would manage to secure peace and ensure security.

The Council, as the principal organ for the promotion and maintenance of international peace and security, has a critical role to play in facilitating and supporting genuine and comprehensive efforts to prevent and resolve violence, as well as to build and sustain durable peace initiatives. Unfortunately, we all know that the Council has been effectively paralysed, and its dysfunction has seriously undermined its credibility. The Council is no longer a place for dialogue and compromise to find solutions to many threats and challenges afflicting our world, but a platform for point-scoring and grandstanding among major Powers, and the rest of us are being forced to be sandwiched in between. Nowhere is that more evident than in the discussion on issues of peace and security in the Middle East.

In the face of this standoff, we are seeing attempts being made to export some of the difficult and contentious issues elsewhere. This in our opinion will contribute only to widening the existing division and further undermining the international peace and security architecture. As far as we are concerned, there is no other alternative but to restore the credibility of the Council. The major Powers in the Council have a special responsibility to revive what one astute observer of the United Nations has referred to as "the shared sense of strategic purpose" among them. However, we should not blame the big five alone; we the elected members have a responsibility, too, and if we are able to play our role we have the capacity to contribute to unlocking the logjam in the Council. We tried to demonstrate that last year, but we need to do more in fulfilling our obligations to the wider membership of the United Nations.

Finally, the conflict and crisis situations in the region require urgent and concerted action. Unless we do everything possible to reverse the current dangerous trajectory, we will not be able to avert a looming disaster down the road. The sooner the Council gets its act together, the better for peace and security in the region and indeed the entire world.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): I would like to thank the delegation of the Russian Federation for convening this well-conceived debate and express our appreciation to the Secretary-General for his very thoughtful and comprehensive analysis of the situation in the Middle East and North Africa region.

We agree that the frequency and intensity of individual conflicts in the broader region of the Middle East and North Africa have increased, with grave consequences entailing global insecurity and ramifications. Those violent conflicts, including the Palestinian-Israel situation, Syria, the Golan Heights and Yemen, are having an increasingly serious impact on countries in Africa, South and South-East Asia, Europe and other regions. The only viable solution involves greater rapprochement, cooperation and confidence-building among the United Nations Member States, Council members and nations in the triangular configuration of Arab States, Israel and Iran. As my President wrote in his *Manifesto: The World. The 21st Century*:

> "We should also have learnt from past wars and conflicts that it is impossible to ensure our own security by undermining the security of others. That is why a global coalition of States for peace, stability, trust and security under the United Nations auspices should be set up. Our common task for the next decade should be to end wars and conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen, Libya, and Syria, in eastern Ukraine and the Palestinian-Israeli confrontation."

Our specific regret is that major humanitarian crises in the region are overwhelming, thereby impacting millions of people in several countries with great shortfalls in funding and supplies. We are also witnessing the destruction of critical infrastructure that support human life. My delegation therefore presents the following observations for consideration, while bearing in mind the questions raised in the concept note (S/2018/524, annex).

First, in order to counter the causes of recurring and potential new conflicts, a thorough and comprehensive plan of action needs to be implemented by Governments, the United Nations and international organizations in strict adherence with international conventions and the new reforms of the Secretary-General.

Second, the political deterioration of State authority that is being usurped by non-State actors

and armed groups calls for further action. Therefore, peacekeeping operations must be accompanied by preventive diplomacy, mediation and sustainable peace. The political and diplomatic settlement of conflicts should prevail over the use of force. There has to be full engagement of the United Nations, the good offices of the Secretary-General and his Envoys and Special Representatives, as well as upholding Council resolutions cooperatively. A united Security Council is important for sending strong messages to warring parties, so as, inter alia, to stop the rhetoric and inflammatory language, as well as the use of force by all sides, and to uphold human rights.

Third, it is critical to reach agreement among warring parties, while honouring ceasefires and allowing unhindered humanitarian access by land, air and sea to those most in need. Those who perpetrate horrific brutalities, such as using hospitals and schools for purposes of war or sexual violence as a weapon of war, should be brought to justice. We also need to review the Council's sanctions regimes and halt unilateral sanctions and embargoes that hurt innocent civilians.

Fourth, conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa region are like a vortex drawing in neighbouring countries and even other Powers, thereby resulting in proxy wars in an attempt to change the balance of power. A united Security Council is all the more important to withstand those undesirable trends.

Fifth, now is the time for the entire United Nations system and Council members, including its five permanent members, in the first instance, and 10 elected members, in partnership with other international and regional stakeholders, to find middle ground in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the investigation into the use of chemical weapons, among others. We need to safeguard the credibility of the Council as an apex body of the United Nations. Investigations into all violations must be thorough, objective and impartial so that the international community can fairly identify their perpetrators in full compliance with international law.

Sixth, Kazakhstan believes that unilateral steps, especially the use of force, should not be taken for whatever reason by any country or group of countries without the approval of the Council. In addition, the principles of territorial integrity, independence and sovereignty should always be observed under the Charter of the United Nations. At the same time, it is critical in global relations that civilians be protected from all categories of perpetrators — as in the case of the use of chemical weapons in Syria — who must be thoroughly investigated and dealt with based on objective facts and evidence under international law. As host countries, Governments must also ensure the security of United Nations personnel and peacekeepers.

Seventh, due to the vacuum of functioning State institutions, terrorist groups have found a strong foothold in unstable areas, which has resulted in the massive exodus of refugees from numerous countries. The burden is borne by hosting countries like Jordan and Lebanon that require international support. Refugees from the Middle East and North Africa have changed the political, demographic and security landscape of Europe, thereby demanding a new global compact on migration.

Eighth, effective strategies to prevent and address conflicts and related scourges involving terrorism require, besides political intervention, the three-fold strategy that Kazakhstan has proposed. That comprises strengthening the security-development nexus, as well as deploying a revamped regional and innovative whole-of-system approach with the United Nations delivering as one. We also believe that the international community needs to coalesce in prioritizing further measures to eliminate international terrorism to ensure a safer world. Governments must act under international law and manage shared challenges and opportunities along the way. We should also work towards the establishment of a zone free of nuclear weapons and other types of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East.

In conclusion, we would also like to refer to the first presidential statement of the year, adopted in January, which, during its presidency, Kazakhstan introduced on preventive diplomacy and sustaining peace. The Council, within its mandate to maintain international peace and security, accordingly noted

> "the importance of continuing to strive towards sustainable peace and achieving a world free of violent conflicts by the United Nations Centenary" (*S/PRST/2018/1, p. 1*).

It is therefore good that we now have a targeted time frame since the goal is a dream with a deadline. We hope that today's discussion will help us to move constructively forward, through dialogue, confidence-building measures and the equal distribution of resources. Those have been presented in profoundly

reflective treatises and manifestos on war and peace, including our own initiatives.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China thanks the Russian Federation for taking the initiative to convene this open meeting on a comprehensive assessment of the situation in the Middle East and North Africa, and is confident that the meeting will enhance understanding and consensus among all parties and contribute to de-escalating and stabilizing the regional situation. China welcomes Russian Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs Sergey Vasilievich Vershinin to New York to preside over this meeting, and thanks Secretary-General Guterres for his comprehensive briefing.

At present, the situation in the Middle East and North Africa is grave. Inter-State differences, sectarian disputes and ethnic conflicts are interactive. Wars, conflicts, terrorist threats and humanitarian disasters are intertwined. The complex hotspot issues, such as Palestine, Syria, Yemen and Libya, have been going simmering for years, defying solutions. The ongoing instability in the Middle East and North Africa is detrimental to the interests of the peoples of the region, with ramifications for world peace and development. The countries of the region and the international community need to embrace the philosophy of common, integrated, cooperative and sustainable security and together build a community of a shared future and find a path to peace, stability, development and prosperity. China would like to make the following observations on how to solve the hot-spot issue in the region.

First, there is a need to pursue dialogue and consultations in a comprehensive effort to take forward the political settlement of hot-spot issues in the region. The question of Palestine is at the core of the Middle East issue — a fundamental issues that bears on peace in the region. It is imperative to adhere to the two-State solution and on basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions, and to resume peace talks as early as possible in order to resolve the issues of borders, settlements, the status of Jerusalem and refugees.

We must support the work of the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria and the Astana dialogue to maintain the momentum of the ceasefire and to reactivate the Geneva peace talks as soon as possible in order to reach a political solution acceptable to all Syrian parties.

It is necessary to support the mediation efforts of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen and facilitate an early return of the Yemeni parties to the track of political dialogue.

We must support Libyan parties in their effort to achieve reconciliation and to strengthen their capacity for integrated national governance and development. Efforts should be made to ensure the comprehensive and effective implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on the Iranian nuclear issue.

Secondly, there is a need to enhance synergy and to maintain a country-led and -owned process, with the United Nations as the main channel of mediation. The future and destiny of the region should be determined through joint consultations among the countries of the region. It is imperative to respect the principles of sovereign equality and non-interference in internal affairs, as established in the Charter of the United Nations, respect the will of the countries concerned in taking forward the country-led and -owned political process. The United Nations should play its role as the main channel of mediation, actively promote the political processes in Syria, Yemen, Libya and Iraq, and provide support for dialogue among the parties to the conflict. Regional organizations should promote mutual trust and solidarity among all parties concerned and cooperate with the United Nations. Countries outside the region should play constructive roles in facilitating peace and providing help, but should not wilfully interfere in the internal affairs of other States or impose specific models.

Thirdly, an integrated approach should be followed in addressing the various drivers of the crises in the region. Multiple civilizations and religions originate and converge in this region. It is imperative to respect cultural and religious diversity, engage and learn from each other on an equal footing and prevent cultural differences and religious conflicts from exacerbating the regional conflicts.

Combating terrorism in all of its forms and manifestations is a shared responsibility of countries of the region. Those countries and the international community should strengthen cooperation in their fight against terrorism, consolidate their achievements in that fight, prevent the spillover of foreign terrorist fighters and their returnees, and curb the spread of terrorist ideology. The parties should work together to alleviate the humanitarian situation of refugees and provide greater assistance to countries hosting massive numbers of refugees.

Fourthly, there is a need to promote sustainable development and address the root causes of instability in the region. War, conflict, terrorism and the refugee migration crisis can all be traced to the root of poverty and underdevelopment. Development has been the key to the solutions to all problems and that also holds true for this region. It is necessary to support the countries of the region in exploring appropriate development paths by themselves, fully implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, building up their capacity for poverty reduction and development, and consolidating the material basis for peace.

The Middle East and North Africa have produced brilliant civilizations and have glorious histories that have made important contributions to humankind's progress. We are confident that the countries and peoples of those regions have the will, the ability and the wisdom to find a solution that will restore peace and tranquillity. As a permanent Member of the Security Council, China has always maintained an objective and impartial position, and played a constructive role in seeking solutions to hot-spot issues in the region. We have always respected the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the countries of the region. We stand for solutions reached through dialogue and consultation, not force, and firmly support the mediation efforts of the United Nations.

As the largest developing country, China is ready to strengthen its practical cooperation with the countries of the region under the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative, thus contributing to the achievement of regional development and prosperity.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to welcome and thank the Secretary-General for his personal commitment to resolving the crises in the Middle East.

I would also like to thank the Russian presidency for organizing this debate, in which I would like to explain the great principles that guide France's action in the face of the multiplying regional crises. First is the goal of establishing inclusive and democratic governance, which is key to the stabilization of the Middle East. Next is combatting terrorism, which, today, is one of the greatest threats to international peace and security. Finally, there is a need to promote the multilateralism of the United Nations and the international legal framework.

Democratic, inclusive and pluralist governance in the Middle East is a precondition for any long-term stability in the region. There is no alternative to a political solution for conflicts in the Middle East. Regional conflicts are often the product of and are always fed by the lack of the rule of law and political openness. It is imperative to create the conditions for inclusive governance based on respect for human rights.

The case of Syria is an unfortunate and perfect example. The regime's long years of dictatorship over its people created and nourished the conflict and fuelled radicalization. The regime's choice of repression as a one-size-fits-all response to any dissent, its polices of sieges and forced displacement, and its recent legal expression under Law Number 10, cannot only lead to diminished stability. Today, the risk of regional escalation is real.

After seven years of war in Syria, only a political transition based on an inclusive intra-Syrian transition, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015) will allow for an exit to the crisis and long-term stability. Any solution ignoring that dimension will not address the causes of the conflict. Neither France nor any of its partners will participate in financing the perpetuation of this unjust and unstable system. In order to achieve an inclusive political solution, all concerned parties, particularly small groups and the Astana guarantors, must band together in support of the mediation of the United Nations. France is working actively with its partners to implement a coordination mechanism between the two forums on the basis of three primary priorities: allowing the establishment of a constitutional committee that is balanced and effective; implementing confidence-building measures leading to conditions conducive to a political process; and preparing free and transparent elections in which all Syrians will participate.

We know that the vacuum left behind by the destruction of all political spaces favoured the emergence of terrorism in Syria, just as it did throughout the region. The fight against terrorism is the priority in our action in the Middle East. Da'esh, in recent months, has suffered significant military defeats in the Levant, thanks primarily to the action of the Global Coalition against Da'esh, in which France has participated since its creation. While the group has lost its essential territorial stronghold, the fight against Da'esh in Syria and Iraq is not yet over. In order to prevent the creation of sanctuaries, we most sustainably stabilize the

regions liberated by the Coalition. The threat posed by Al-Qaida in the region is also far from over. It remains clearly present in the Arabian Peninsula.

Apart from the military effort, France believes that we should do better collectively in four areas in which France spares no effort. The first matter concerns the overwhelming number of foreign terrorist fighters. The second issue is combating financing for terrorism. That is why France organized an international conference on the topic in Paris from 25 to 26 April, which led to the international community adopting an ambitious agenda. The third area is the propagation of the ideology of terrorist groups, in particular through the Internet, where there is still progress to be made, in close partnership with the private sector. The fourth issue is fighting impunity for crimes committed by terrorist groups. Reaffirming the prohibition of the use of chemical weapons is essential, while not only the Syrian army but also the Islamic State in Syria and the Levant and in Iraq frequently resort to such weapons. Preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons and their spread to non-State actors requires above all strengthening the means available to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and establishing a new attribution mechanism to succeed the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism.

In Libya, as in the rest of the Middle East, lasting success against terrorist groups requires not only a political solution and a stabilization and reconciliation process but also strengthening and unifying national civil and security institutions under the control of civilian authorities. The national conference process launched by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General should make it possible to establish the conditions necessary for elections and for the main Libyan actors to commit to respecting the time frame established in Paris on 29 May, in close cooperation, of course, with Mr. Ghassan Salamé, who can count on our full and complete support. The international community must be unified in its support for the commitments made.

Terrorists are also fuelled by organized crime, in particular all kinds of trafficking. In that perspective, the Security Council adopted individual sanctions against a number of migrant traffickers in Libya. In order to dry up the resources of criminal and terrorist groups, it is necessary to combat the economy of predation and criminalization in Libya, as well as elsewhere. Combating terrorist groups ultimately means seeking to put an end to the breeding grounds for recruitment by ensuring that a lack of prospects does not make a new generation vulnerable to their rhetoric.

In that regard, the role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), among other entities, is exemplary. Let us bear that in mind a few hours from a pledging conference that will largely determine the possibility for UNRWA schools to open for the next school year. Everyone should very carefully weigh their responsibilities in that regard. Any space in the region left vacant by UNRWA will be filled by other actors, in particular in Gaza, where minors make up more than half the population.

I come to my last point. Given all the crises in the Middle East, it is more crucial than ever to ensure that our approach focuses on the international framework for crisis settlement through two pillars: promoting multilateralism and the role of the United Nations, on the one hand, and respect for international law, on the other hand. In that regard, the role of the Security Council is essential. We demonstrated that by adopting resolution 2231 (2015), which endorsed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action as a result of the international community's resolute and pragmatic and realistic multilateralism. France will continue to meet its responsibilities for as long as Iran fulfils its commitments. We also call for a response to our concerns with regard to the ballistic and regional activities of Iran. That is necessary for the security of the region.

However, the silence of the Council with regard to certain crises will compromise our collective credibility in the long term. After three conflicts over the past decade, the Gaza Strip has been on the brink of collapse and a new escalation for several months. In that regard, on several occasions we have called on the Security Council for a clear message that does not ignore either the responsibility of Hamas or the obligations of Israel. We regret the fact that, to date, we have not been heard. However, we will not give up. The recent developments cannot be dissociated from the lack of a political solution to the Israeli-Palestinian question. It is more necessary than ever to reaffirm the parameters of the two-State solution, to which there is no viable alternative and which is enshrined in a Council resolution. The ongoing settlement activity in all its forms destroys such a prospect on the ground. I am thinking in particular of the threat to the Khan

Al-Ahmar community. The Security Council cannot abandon its responsibility. France stands ready to contribute to any new development in that regard.

In conflict situations, the role of the Council is to call on all warring parties to respect the relevant law. With regard to the situation in Yemen, we should remind the parties of the need to respect international humanitarian law and to protect civilians, in particular women and children. It is imperative that the parties ensure comprehensive and unimpeded humanitarian access, in cooperation with the United Nations, and protect the health infrastructure and personnel, as resolution 2286 (2016) underscores.

With regard to United Nations mediation, the Security Council has expressed its unanimous support for the work of Special Envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths and for his efforts to relaunch the peace negotiations. We remain convinced that the only lasting resolution of the crisis in Yemen is a political solution. That is why we should contribute and continue to call on the parties to engage in good-faith negotiations, facilitated by the United Nations, with a view to an inclusive political agreement.

France is convinced that respect for human rights and international humanitarian law is an essential precondition for lasting peace in the Middle East. Impunity for crimes should not and cannot be an exception regionally. All victims of violations of human rights and international humanitarian law deserve justice. The international community must work to that end, in particular through mechanisms to combat impunity that it has set up created or implemented adopted whether they be international criminal jurisdiction, such as the Special Tribunal for Lebanon or the International Criminal Court in the case of Libya, or to collect evidence in order to prepare legal proceedings, such as in the cases of Syria and Iraq, in support of the competent national authorities or as a substitute for them if such authorities cannot or are not willing to do so.

In conclusion, Sir, you may rest assured of the resolute engagement of France in that region of the world in respect of its principles and in commitment to its tireless efforts to address the crisis in the Middle East. We would like to see the Security Council fully shoulder its responsibilities. France also intends to contribute to all efforts to establish regional dialogue mechanisms for the peaceful settlement of disputes and dialogue for the stability of the Middle East. The future of the Middle East and the credibility of the Security Council are at stake.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I would like to thank the Russian Federation for the opportunity to discuss holistically the situation in the Middle East and North Africa. I think that we all agree that many of the conflicts in the region share root causes and complex linkages. We agree that an approach to resolving such conflicts that needs to consider each conflict in isolation will not succeed. They need to be looked at in the round. I think that we are also aware that there are some existentialist struggles between some Member States in the region, but not all are aggressive towards their neighbours or commit unfriendly acts towards them.

People have been saying that the people of the Middle East and North Africa region should perhaps have their own Helsinki Final Act moment. I do not want to be prescriptive. However, I think something that brings the region together would be very worthwhile in that regard. We would be happy to join any consideration of that issue. Overall our understanding of any conflict should be shaped by an analysis that looks at the full breadth of root causes, the role of regional and international actors and the individual history and circumstances of the country concerned. In turn, the response of the Security Council and of the United Nations as a whole to such conflicts must be holistic.

Before I turn to the Russian concept note (S/2018/524, annex) and our own views, I would like to start by fully endorsing the French Ambassador's remarks about Iran. We will have another opportunity to talk about Iran later this week, at which time I will expand upon my remarks. For now I would just like to pledge the support of the United Kingdom to what he said.

There were many points in the Russian concept note with which we agreed. We agree that the humanitarian consequences of the various conflicts in the Middle East region are devastating and that the statistics released by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) are truly staggering. A total of 22 million people are in need of assistance in Yemen, 13 million in Syria, 1.9 million in the occupied Palestinian territories and 1 million in Libya. The humanitarian relief efforts of all Member States, international actors and ordinary citizens have indeed helped to avert some suffering but it is not enough, and, according to OCHA's own

statistics, 66 per cent of humanitarian appeals are yet to be fulfilled. We recently wrote as the United Kingdom to the Secretary General to set our own humanitarian contribution to the crises in the Middle East.

We continue to see examples of States restricting access to humanitarian agencies and attacks by armed groups on humanitarian workers. What justification can there be for such attacks? We agree with you, Mr. President, that humanitarian assistance should not be politicized but, as long as such attacks continue, it will be. Conflict has affected religious and ethnic minorities in particular, for example, the Yazidi in Syria and Iraq and the Baha'i in Iran and Yemen. Terrorist actors and State institutions in the region have been responsible for some of the worst persecutions in history. Like you, Sir, we hope that the Security Council can unite behind efforts to resolve conflicts peacefully. We should do all we can as the Security Council to support efforts made by the Secretary-General and his Special Representatives to bring peace to the region, make serious progress in Syria, Yemen and Libya, use our collective and bilateral efforts to put pressure on those who oppose or undermine such efforts and ensure that peacekeeping missions are fit for purpose. With regard to the Middle East peace process, which has been mentioned by a number of speakers, we reiterate our support for the two-State solution and look forward to the American proposals, which we hope will be issued soon.

There are some areas where we do not share your views, Mr. President, as set out in the concept note. I would like to begin this part of my statement by saying that I have just come from the General Assembly debate on the issue of the responsibility to protect. It strikes me that issue goes to the heart of many of our disagreements about how to handle conflicts. Today's concept note calls for a commitment to the supremacy of international law and the need for a collective approach to the problems of the region — and we can endorse that fully. However, when populations are injured or persecuted because of the actions of their own Governments, it not only flouts international human rights law and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which every country in the Chamber has pledged to uphold, it could also be a precursor to a wider conflict. If the Security Council and the international community do not take an interest at that early stage, there is a much greater likelihood that the situation will spiral out of control and that there will eventually be conflict, including cross-border conflict, whether armed incursions or sending refugees across borders. Ultimately there is therefore also a much greater likelihood not just that the Security Council will ask to take action, but that it will need to take action in order to address the root causes. I therefore invite all countries that do not believe that the Security Council should review situations of human rights persecutions in individual countries to see the logical train of where ignoring such events is likely to lead.

If I may, I would like to quote from the preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which celebrates its seventieth anniversary this year:

> "... it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law".

That is the reason why we in the United Kingdom believe that human rights is properly relevant to Security Council discussions on any given international peace and security situation.

You say, Mr. President, that unilateral action is doomed to failure. Like all of the speakers so far, we in the United Kingdom would like to see the Security Council take collective action, but it is blocked. And where it is not blocked, it is subsequently disregarded. International action cannot solely be a matter of the lowest common denominator. Several speakers have already mentioned Syria. We are all aware of the circumstances in that country. The Security Council has been blocked from holding to account those responsible for violating international law. A draft resolution (S/2014/348) to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court was vetoed in 2014 (see S/PV.7180). This year a draft resolution (S/2018/321) that would have allowed the Joint Investigative Mechanism to continue its vital work was vetoed (see S/PV.8228). The use of chemical weapons, whether by terrorists or State actors, must be investigated. Those responsible must be held to account, and we would assert that much greater danger lies in letting it be thought that chemical weapons can ever be used as a weapon of war and that the international prohibition on their use can be disregarded.

Furthermore, there have been reports over the weekend of air and artillery attacks against the de-escalation zone in south-western Syria. Such reports are deeply concerning and appear to point to the Syrian Government. A military offensive by the Syrian Government would be a flagrant violation

of the ceasefire and the de-escalation agreement in which Russia has been involved. We urge everyone with influence on the situation to help uphold the commitment and to encourage restraint.

Sanctions are a vital part of the Security Council's arsenal. As Article 41 of the Charter of the United Nations makes clear, they give very real effect to our decisions and turn our words in the Chamber into tangible consequences for those who threaten international peace and security. Sanctions are not our first resort — they are not a measure we ever take lightly — but we know that they work. They have helped bring peace and security to Liberia and Sierra Leone. They helped bring Iran and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to the negotiating table. And they continue to play a vital role in the fight against Da'esh and Al-Qaida in Iraq, Syria and beyond.

We believe that there are additional issues that would merit discussion by the Council that are not covered in today's concept note, but which could underpin future discussions by the Council on this important subject. We agree with the Secretary-General that political participation in the region remains weak and that we must strengthen democratic institutions. I would like to echo his tribute to Tunisia and endorse his words about the problems caused by retarding economic opportunity. A genuine holistic approach to conflict in the region cannot ignore the issue of good governance. Good governance from strong, stable State institutions is the best way to maintain peace and security.

Bad governance can be devastating, and we have seen that in a number of countries in the region. As I was saying earlier, when Governments violate their citizens' human rights we know that the risk of conflict and suffering increases. It is the Council's responsibility to consider and be informed on all these issues, owing to their impact on international peace and security. As an international community, we must support institutions that uphold the values that the United Nations was set up to protect and that work for the benefit of all citizens.

Lastly, I would like to say a word about post-conflict reconstruction. Failure to stabilize and reconcile communities after a prolonged conflict will fail to restore peace and security in the long term. It is not a trade-off between peace and justice. The task of the Council is to help the United Nations and countries themselves find the right way to have both peace and justice. I think we all know that the role of women can be vital in that endeavour. International actors, including the Security Council, play a vital role in ensuring that limited resources are distributed effectively in support of institutions that address the root causes of previous conflicts.

Mr. Djédjé (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation thanks the Russian Federation for holding today's important meeting on situations that constitute threats to international peace and security in the Middle East and North Africa. We welcome Mr. Sergey Vershinin, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, and thank him for presiding over today's meeting. We also thank Secretary-General António Guterres for his briefing.

My delegation hopes that today's debate will provide an opportunity for the members of the Security Council to hold a constructive dialogue on the root causes and dynamics that fuel the conflicts that these regions are facing. These exchanges should also enable the Council to consider collective actions that would bring these conflicts to an end in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and international law. The situations in the Middle East and North Africa continue to be marked both by the persistence of old conflicts and the emergence of new ones, whose asymmetrical and complex nature requires concerted action by the United Nations and regional organizations, in accordance with the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations, particularly Chapter VIII.

In addition to the decades-long Israeli-Palestinian crisis, there are conflicts in Syria, Libya and Yemen. My delegation notes with regret the lack of political prospects for resolving the various conflicts, the shortage of democratic governance, the stalemate in peace processes, the high geopolitical and religious tensions and the humanitarian tragedies that the people of the region are enduring. The emergence of peripheral and non-State actors, including armed groups and such terrorist organizations as Al-Qaida, the Al-Nusra Front and the Islamic State, presents threats to security and stability, not only in the Middle East and North Africa, but worldwide.

My delegation would like to emphasize that it is through unity that the Security Council could be in a position to play a leading role in the prevention and resolution of conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa, and indeed anywhere else in the world. In this regard, my country deplores the lack of unity in the

Council, particularly on the problem of Syria, the Iranian nuclear issue and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

With regard to the Iranian nuclear issue, my delegation is of the view that the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, adopted on 14 July 2015, constitutes a solid guarantee for the implementation of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and for regional and global peace and security. Côte d'Ivoire therefore urges all the parties to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action to resolve any disagreements with respect to the implementation of its provisions through negotiations within the joint commission provided for in the agreeement's annex IV. In this regard, we welcome all initiatives aimed at finding a peaceful, lasting and satisfactory solution for all concerned with the Iranian nuclear issue.

With regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Côte d'Ivoire reaffirms its position in support of a two-State solution, in which Israel and Palestine coexist in peace and security on the basis of the relevant Security Council resolutions. We therefore call on Israelis and Palestinians to renounce violence and unilateral action, which only make the prospects increasingly remote of resuming political dialogue with a view to reaching a peaceful solution to a conflict that has lasted too long. My country also urges the Council to play its role to the full, in order to stimulate a new dynamic in the search for a negotiated solution to this crisis.

The conflict in Syria continues to crystallize tensions and polarize the Security Council, particularly with the recurrent allegations of the use of chemical weapons by the warring parties. The absence of an independent mechanism for accountability and the fight against impunity remains a major challenge for the Council. It is vital that we overcome our differences with a view to establishing an independent international mechanism for investigating the use of chemical weapons, in Syria and throughout the world. My country also reiterates its support for the efforts of Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura aimed at resuming a political dialogue on the basis of the Geneva process, as prescribed by the relevant provisions of resolution 2254 (2015).

With regard to the situation in Yemen, my delegation deplores the dire humanitarian situation in the country and the military escalation around the port city of Hudaydah. We remain convinced that there can be no alternative to a political solution in Yemen. We therefore urge the various parties to end hostilities and engage meaningfully so as to achieve a political settlement of the crisis as part of the efforts of the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Yemen, Mr. Martin Griffiths.

With regard to Libya, Côte d'Ivoire reiterates its support for the Action Plan of the Special Representative, Mr. Ghassan Salamé. We urge the international community to give it its full support in order to advance the national reconciliation process and lay the foundations for lasting stability and peace in Libya through an inclusive democratic process.

We believe that the persistence of these crises reflects the limitations of the international community in providing appropriate responses to these various armed conflicts, which are factors of instability at the regional and international levels. This situation undermines the confidence of international public opinion in the ability of the Security Council to restore peace and stability in those regions, whose peoples have been affected by years and even decades of conflict. From Afghanistan to Yemen, Syria, Palestine and Libya, the Council is struggling to meet its responsibilities in maintaining international peace and security because of the numerous blockages to which it is often subjected, even though civilian populations are dealing with extreme humanitarian situations where violations of human rights and international humanitarian law are a daily reality for them.

In the face of those blockages, which have rendered joint action ineffective and promoted unilateral initiatives, my delegation reaffirms its commitment to multilateralism, which is the most effective way to achieve lasting peace and development that benefits everyone. In this regard, we particularly recommend five areas to focus on: first, respect for the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, including the peaceful settlement of conflicts; secondly, the use of dialogue and political solutions as the preferred means of resolving crises; thirdly, collaboration with regional organizations, in accordance with Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations; fourthly, identification of the root causes of conflicts and a holistic approach to their resolution that integrates regional actors and strategies for development and combating poverty; and lastly, a coordinated fight against terrorism and violent extremism and the prevention of the spread of weapons of mass destruction.

The current situation of conflicts in the world could give rise to scepticism with respect to the Security Council's ability to provide lasting responses to the conflicts that the world is mourning.

Côte d'Ivoire, which in the recent past has been a focus of the Security Council's attention, remains convinced that wherever the Council has been able to demonstrate unity and act with firmness, it has been able to effectively rise to security and stability challenges and put an end to the suffering of thousands of people.

We would say in conclusion that the Security Council, which has the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, must play a leading role in the prevention and settlement of conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa. In that regard, regional organizations such as the League of Arab States and the African Union must be fully involved in the prevention and peaceful settlement of disputes through the establishment and strengthening of a strategic partnership between the United Nations and such organizations.

Mr. Cohen (United States of America): We thank the Secretary-General for his important briefing this morning.

We are grateful to our Russian colleagues for this opportunity to explore the root causes of conflict in the Middle East. This meeting is timely because today Russia has the ability to stop the military escalation that is happening in the region as we speak. As noted by the representative of the United Kingdom, in Syria the Al-Assad regime has launched an offensive in the south-west de-escalation zone negotiated by Jordan, Russia and the United States. Yet again we are seeing the Syrian regime launch airstrikes and artillery, barrel-bomb and rocket attacks that are displacing tens of thousands of people. Russia itself launched airstrikes in that zone over the weekend, in clear violation of an agreement that was meant to save lives and promote a political solution in Syria.

The ceasefire reflects a commitment between President Trump and President Putin, and the United States remains determined to uphold our commitment. On a day when Russia has asked us to talk about the root causes of conflict in the Middle East, we expect Russia to do its part to uphold the ceasefire that it helped establish.

Before going further, it is worth noting the enormous positive contributions that the peoples of the Middle East have made to the world. It is a region of ancient civilizations that has given us all so much. In the arts, in language, in science and in philosophy, in religion, the world owes a great deal to the people of the Middle East.

Conflict has many roots, and in the Middle East, for too many decades, brutal dictatorships and authoritarian Governments have denied basic human rights to their people. That has inevitably caused conflict. Violent religious fanaticism from non-governmental groups, as well as from some Governments, has also caused conflict. Lack of economic development and economic opportunity is a source of conflict.

This is, of course, not a new topic for the Security Council, though it is my first chance to participate in this debate. Each month the Council has a meeting on the Middle East, at which the United States tries to drill down on precisely this question of root causes. In these debates, the United States has raised the issue of the humanitarian crisis in Gaza and the suffering of the people there. What is at the root of this crisis? Hamas, a terrorist group that took power in 2007, has since served as the de facto authority in Gaza. In the 11 years that followed, Hamas has demonstrated far more interest in initiating violence than in caring for the Palestinian people.

The United States has also taken the opportunity in these debates to talk about the widespread and unacceptable use of civilians, including women and children, as human shields in conflicts throughout the Middle East.

At the root of these conflicts are groups such as Hamas and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham, which are willing to make a ruthless, bloodthirsty tradeoff: they sacrifice innocent civilians in order to accomplish their political objectives. Children and families are either used to provide cover for their military infrastructure or become victims of attacks intended to rally the international media to their overlords' cause, either way ensuring that emotions harden and conflicts continue.

The United States has also used this monthly meeting to talk about the key missing ingredient for peace in the Middle East. That ingredient is leaders with the will to do what is needed to achieve peace. The Middle East needs more leaders like Egypt's President

Anwar Sadat — leaders who are willing to step forward, acknowledge hard truths and make compromises. The Middle East needs more leaders like Jordan's King Hussein, who in 1994 created a peace that survives to this day.

We have raised another major cause of conflict in the Middle East, namely, the role of Iran and its partner militia Hizbullah. In war zone after war zone and terrorist act after terrorist act, we find Iran and Hizbullah at the root of violence in the Middle East. We have talked about the arsenal of war being amassed in Lebanon. Its source is Iran and Hizbullah.

We have talked about Bashar Al-Assad's and the Syrian regime's war against the Syrian people. These were people who protested peacefully in 2011 for economic opportunity, political rights and basic human dignity. Their noble pursuit, however, was met with brutal violence in the form of torture, starvation, barrel bombs, chemical weapons and the denial of humanitarian and medical assistance. Standing behind Al-Assad, and fighting alongside his troops, are Hizbullah, Iran and Russia.

The United States has also used these monthly meetings on conflict in the Middle East to highlight Iran's repeated and blatant violations of resolution 2231 (2015) and others. The Security Council unanimously prohibited Iran from transferring weapons to other countries, and yet Iran is the source of weapons in conflicts across the region, from Yemen to Syria to Lebanon. The Security Council unanimously called on Hizbullah to disarm, but the leaders of Hizbullah talk openly about the continuing support they receive from Iran. In the words of one Hizballah leader,

> "Everything Hizbullah eats and drinks, its weapons and rockets, comes from the Islamic Republic of Iran".

Later this week, the Council will meet to talk about the Secretary-General's latest report on the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015). The findings of the report provide even more evidence of Iran fuelling conflicts with the supply of banned weapons.

These are the root causes of conflict in the Middle East: leadership that is unwilling to compromise; Hamas terrorists who sacrifice the well-being of civilians for their own militant objectives; Hizbullah terrorists who roam the Middle East like a rogue, mercenary army; and a regime in Iran that seeks political, military and territorial advantage through the spread of violence and human misery. What ties it all together is the people's lack of voice in their own governance. The people who pay the price of conflict have little or no say in when or if it ends. And those who stand to gain from conflict, such as the regime in Tehran, pay no penalty for the suffering they cause.

And when the people of Syria and Iran have risen up to demand that their Governments respect their rights, they have been met with arrest, torture and murder. It is this oppression — these violations of human rights — that are the ultimate root of the conflicts. And yet there is reason to hope. The desire for human dignity and fundamental human rights is a powerful force.

As the sponsor of today's meeting, the Russian Federation itself a testament to this phenomenon. Its predecessor State, the Soviet Union, was among the most oppressive and brutal Governments in the world. After more than 70 years of being denied their basic human rights and human dignity, the Russian people, as well as the Ukrainian people, the people of the Baltic States and the people of the Central Asian republics, finally had their say.

The great American columnist Charles Krauthammer, who, tragically, passed away a few days ago, once wrote that discussions of root causes can lead to despair, because root causes are difficult to change, if they can be changed at all. While I appreciate this analysis, I urge that we not walk away from today's meeting in despair, but instead that we go with a broadened understanding of the sources of conflict in the Middle East and a renewed determination to change them.

The United States believes peace is possible because we believe in the right of people to govern themselves. We will continue to pursue the causes of peace, freedom and human rights in the Middle East, and, with these, an end to the conflicts that have for too long plagued the people of this great region.

Mr. Llorenty Solíz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation would like at the outset to thank the Secretary-General for his briefing and the Russian presidency for having convened today's very important debate.

We are gathered this morning at a time of roiling tensions across the globe, especially in the Middle East

and North Africa. Many conflicts exist that represent a threat not just to the region but also to international peace and security. We are speaking here of the situations in Syria, Libya, Yemen, Iraq and Palestine, as well as of cross-cutting issues such as the threat of terrorism, the alarming number of displaced persons and refugees and the trafficking and smuggling of persons, among others.

In the case of Syria, the conflict has been going on for eight years, and we are not seeing any letup in the constant siege and violence against the Syrian people, mainly children, who, in addition to living with the psychological consequences of that situation, are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. The crisis has generated more than 500,000 deaths since its inception.

In the case of Libya, we are facing a conflict where violations of international law, human rights law and international humanitarian law continue to be committed. It should be noted that this reality continues to have repercussions on the situation of instability in the Sahel region, which is the cause of many challenges in that part of Africa.

The Palestinian question is without a doubt, as some of our colleagues have mentioned, at the heart of the conflicts in the Middle East, and not only because of its long history, which dates back more than 70 years, but rather because as long as that issue is not resolved, there can be no truly sustainable peace in the region. The core issue that runs through the Palestinian question is the occupation by Israel of territories that do not belong to it, including the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem. That poses a threat to the lives of Palestinian and Israeli civilians and threatens the security of the entire region. We are convinced that the only long-term way to put an end to the situation of occupation in which Palestine lives is the two-State solution in which a free, sovereign and independent Palestinian State is finally established with the pre-1967 international borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

I turn now to the consequences of conflicts, chief among them are the humanitarian crises, as is the case in Yemen, where more than 8 million people are at risk of famine and 60 per cent of the population is experiencing food insecurity and where a cholera outbreak has affected more than 1 million people. These conflicts have also created millions of displaced persons and refugees who, while fleeing violence in search of safety, often become victims of human trafficking. That is the case in Libya, where there has been evidence of cases of slavery.

Another consequence of this situation is the proliferation of terrorist groups, who, by taking advantage of Government vacuums, the weakness and lack of capacity of law enforcement and security forces, and the lack of border control have found spaces to impose their violent ideology, commit crimes and perpetrate serious violations of human rights, which could constitute crimes against humanity.

We also believe that it is important to talk about the root causes of these conflicts. If we analyse all those conflicts, we can find a common denominator. The policies of regime change, interventionism and interference in the internal affairs of States have been some of the main causes, as we already mentioned with regard to the spread of terrorism, of governance vacuums and have weakened the forces of law and order and security and resulted in a lack of border control, which has enabled chaos to emerge.

We reiterate that the use of unilateral actions is contrary to international law and the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and constitutes a flagrant violation of multilateralism and a serious threat to the international order. Unilateral actions are illegal measures that extend the domestic jurisdiction and legislation of one State over another, in violation of the principles of equality, sovereignty and the territorial integrity of States. In other words, there cannot be a double standard, and one cannot claim to uphold international law by violating it.

In essence, one of the reasons for the use of unilateral actions and regime change policies in the region is the search for control and ownership of natural resources and geopolitical control. Sovereign control and management of natural resources is paramount to the cessation of hostilities and economic development. When a country maintains effective control over its resources and there is political will it is possible to achieve structural change leading to stabilization and the strengthening of the rule of law.

Finally, Bolivia, as advocate of respect for international law and the culture and the right to peace, supports the use of peaceful means for the settlement of disputes, including good offices, preventive diplomacy, multilateralism, non-interference and respect for the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of

States. Those are universal principles recognized by the international community and constitute effective tools to prevent the scourge, not only of war and its consequences, but also of the various conflicts resulting from the root causes I described here.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): I join others in welcoming this opportunity to exchange views on this important topic. We thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

We align ourselves with the statement of the European Union to be delivered later in the debate.

The people of the Middle East and North Africa region continue to suffer the dire consequences of cycles of conflict. That not only affects the countries in the region individually, but also collectively, as the conflicts are often intertwined. Moreover, what happens in the region has a profound and immediate impact on the rest of the world.

With so much at stake, our collective ambition in addressing these conflicts should be consistently high. The focus should not be on extinguishing fires when they occur, but on preventing the fires before they ignite. That means looking closely at both the spark and the combustible elements. It also means addressing the root causes of conflicts.

In that regard, I will touch upon three aspects: first, the universality of human rights; secondly, integrated conflict prevention; and, thirdly, ending impunity.

My first point concerns the universality of human rights and the importance of inclusive societies. Human rights are universal for a reason, as is our collective responsibility to promote and protect them. If human rights are denied, they affect our individual dignity, fuelling discontent and conflict. But if human rights are respected, they ground democratic and inclusive societies, nurturing harmony and stability. That holds true for all regions of the world.

The people in the Middle East and North Africa know what helps to stabilize their societies: the rule of law, accountable governance and respect for minorities. Historically many countries in the region are places where religious and other minorities prospered living together. The current turbulence is an extra reason to seek practical ways to re-engage communities and to promote mutual tolerance. A good example is intra- and interfaith dialogue.

My second point concerns integrated conflict prevention by addressing political and socioeconomic grievances. The conflicts in the region are interconnected. That is why it is important that the United Nations and the international community have an integrated approach to prevention. Regional tensions should be tackled more structurally through dialogue and mediation. Within his good-offices mandate the Secretary-General can play an enhanced role, but the responsibility to improve relations and strengthen dialogue lies primarily with the region itself.

Work also needs to continue on addressing a wide range of political and socioeconomic grievances in each country, in line with 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Such grievances catalyse radicalization and conflict, and they are not new. Since 2002, Arab scholars have challenged the Governments in their region in successive editions of the *Arab Human Development Report* to overcome three deficits: first, the freedom deficit; secondly, the deficit in the empowerment of women; and, thirdly, the knowledge deficit. Governments and international organizations should pay particular attention to women and girls, and there should be enough space for civil society to play its important role. Integrated conflict prevention also means looking at broader issues, such as climate change and water scarcity. They too can be drivers of conflict in the region.

My third point concerns ending impunity by strengthening accountability. There can be no sustainable peace without justice. The question is how to get there, in a region mired in ongoing conflict and impunity. In countries where there is progress, attention often shifts quickly to reconstruction, but in our view transitional justice is just as important, especially in achieving sustainable peace. We very much welcome all Government and civil-society initiatives to that end. Some of the crimes committed in the region are particularly grave. We need to ensure that those responsible for atrocity crimes are prosecuted and brought to justice. That applies to all parties to the armed conflict, including fighters from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant suspected of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. The perpetrators of crimes must be held to account, irrespective of which side they are on in any particular conflict. Fair and independent investigations and prosecutions are key. Unfortunately, we have to conclude that at the moment serious violations of international law in the region,

which include a consistent disregard for international humanitarian law and the horrific use of chemical weapons, continue to go unpunished. The Security Council should not allow that to happen, and we regret the use of the veto that has blocked the Council's effective action in that regard.

In conclusion, in addressing the root causes of conflict in the region, we have to be ambitious. It will require all of us to make a steadfast and long-term commitment to protecting human rights, ensuring stronger conflict prevention and ending impunity. Only through collective perseverance will sustainable peace in the region prevail.

Mr. Tenya (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank the Russian presidency for convening today's meeting and for the concept note (S/2018/524, annex), which calls on us to consider the root causes of conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa with a view to addressing them in a more comprehensive and effective way and in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. In particular, we would like to acknowledge your presence, Mr. Deputy Minister, and to thank Secretary-General António Guterres for his important briefing.

As a country steeped in its Hispanic heritage, Peru maintains historical ties with the countries of the Middle East and North Africa. We recognize the continuum, from Morocco to the Persian Gulf, of a rich cultural, religious and ethnic diversity and we want to highlight the continuing desire for peace and prosperity of the region's peoples. Any society or region can always achieve sustainable peace with the firm support of the international community, especially in the case of the various communities of the Middle East and North Africa region, which have always demonstrated a great capacity for resilience. The work of the United Nations, particularly the Security Council, must begin with a comprehensive analysis of the root causes of conflicts, which, in many cases, are aggravated by political instability, lack of development, intra-regional rivalries and the presence of violent extremism. In that regard, Peru underscores the importance of ensuring that our Organization can achieve greater coherence, efficiency and effectiveness in the prevention and resolution of conflicts. To that end, we propose what we consider three priority areas for action.

The first is about ensuring the validity of multilateralism and international law. Peru believes that with regard to the maintenance of international peace and security, the Council must always live up to the important responsibilities that the Charter of the United Nations confers on it as well as ensure that its mandated decisions are implemented. We emphasize the binding character of international humanitarian law in any conflict, as well as the need to preserve the regimes for the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and to strengthen international cooperation so as to effectively combat terrorism in all its forms and manifestations.

We also want to emphasize the Council's responsibility for protecting civilian populations from atrocity crimes when national Governments lack the capacity or will to fulfil the basic responsibility of protecting their own people. In accordance with the Charter, we also emphasize the importance of preventive diplomacy, the prerogatives conferred on the Secretary-General and the mechanisms for the peaceful settlement of disputes provided for in Chapter VI, including recourse to the International Court of Justice. Peru believes that in a world characterized by an increasing level of interdependence, timely and predictable action on the part of the United Nations is essential to ensuring the effectiveness of a rules-based collective security system that in turn is essential to sustaining peace in any given country or region.

Our second point concerns the building and strengthening of peaceful and inclusive societies administered by transparent and accountable institutions. The concept of sustainable peace is based on building a common vision for a society while ensuring that the needs of all sectors of the population are considered, which entails establishing inclusive institutions capable of preventing and resolving the conflicts that naturally arise in any society. It also entails having the capacities to meet the people's expectations, acknowledging their legitimate aspirations and protecting and promoting their human rights — especially those of minorities — as well as promoting development centred on the individual and human dignity. We underscore the importance of involving women and young people in building a common vision for a future that is able to break the vicious cycles of present and past conflicts as well as the need to redouble efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as adopted by the Organization.

Lastly, our third point concerns the promotion of new regional dynamics. Peru acknowledges that the

countries of the Middle East and North Africa face significant challenges in achieving sustainable peace that can lead to serious threats to international peace and security, in particular with regard to those posed by terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. However, far from condemning those regions to an endless recurrence of their conflicts, history shows us that in many periods and contexts, the peoples of the Middle East and North Africa have been able to prosper in peace and harmony while preserving their rich cultural, ethnic and religious diversity.

In conclusion, I want to point out how important it is to ensure that those countries, in line with Chapters VI and VIII of the Charter, can depend on regional mechanisms capable of fostering the dialogue and confidence required to peacefully resolve their disputes and, ultimately, ensure their peaceful coexistence.

Mr. Lewicki (Poland): First of all, let me join other delegations in thanking the Russian Federation for providing us with the opportunity to discuss this timely and important topic. I would also like to thank you, Mr. Vershinin, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, for presiding over today's meeting. And we appreciate the insightful briefing by the Secretary-General and his and his staff's commitment to advancing peace and security in the Middle East.

I would also like to align myself with the statement to be delivered later by the observer of the European Union.

The crucial importance of the Middle East dates back to ancient times. Several major religions have their origins in the Middle East, including the three main monotheistic ones — Christianity, Judaism and Islam. Unfortunately, the region has also experienced tension and conflict for many years and today we still face on-going turmoil in various parts of the Middle East.

That is why it is so crucial — not just for the Security Council, but for the whole United Nations community — to address challenges facing the region and their root causes. In that context, let me underline that, while tackling the ongoing conflicts in the region, we must remember the nexus between the three pillars of the United Nations — peace and security, development and human rights. They are interlinked and mutually reinforcing. In the longer term, there can be no long-term peace in the Middle East without development and the protection of human rights.

We believe that, in order to bring us closer to peace and to stimulate development, we should focus on the education of future generations, those who will be responsible for the future of the region. It can be an important conflict prevention tool for deterring extremism and radicalization, particularly among youth. In that context, we would also like to underline the need for women's empowerment as a crucial element for advancing the development of the whole society.

Another factor that should be taken into consideration is institution building and the strengthening of good governance. Those elements play a crucial role in the effective implementation of policies aimed at economic and social development and the full enjoyment of human rights, including social and economic rights in the Middle East.

Like many times before in the Chamber, we also stress a need for full respect for international humanitarian law, including the protection of civilians. The full implementation of the humanitarian imperative is needed to alleviate the suffering of the civilian population. Therefore, allow me to underscore that peace can scarcely be achieved without justice, including ending impunity and ensuring accountability. All perpetrators of grave international crimes committed in the course of the conflicts in the region should be identified and held accountable.

We are also deeply concerned that the members of religious minorities in the Middle East, such as Yazidis and Christians, are particularly vulnerable and are far too often targeted victims of conflicts in the region. Poland strongly condemns violence targeting members of religious minorities in the Middle East. Such violence must stop and its perpetrators must be brought to justice. We deplore the misuse of religion for political purposes.

Furthermore, we call for the development and strengthening of regional political, economic and cultural cooperation, which would benefit all engaged countries. In our opinion, it would create a win-win situation where all disputed matters could be resolved in a peaceful manner through dialogue.

Let me now focus on more specific parts of the region. In Syria, in order to reach an appropriate solution to the conflict, it is necessary to understand the root causes that led to the outbreak of peaceful protests that turned into armed hostilities back in 2011. In our view, the main causes of the conflict were the lack of

significant improvement of living conditions in Syria, inequality, poverty, the lack of individual security, nepotism and the denial of basic human rights and fundamental freedoms. Those causes led to widespread protests that turned into armed struggle.

What should the solution be? We believe that what is needed in order to stop the armed struggle and to put Syria back on the road of sustainable development is national consensus concerning political transition. That can be achieved only through direct talks between representatives of the Syrian opposition and the authorities in Damascus that could lead to a mutually acceptable agreement on political transformation.

While supporting direct involvement by the United Nations in bringing the war in Syria to an end, we also see its role as a facilitator of a process that would result in the adoption of a new Syrian constitution. Reaching a political agreement on a democratic, pluralistic and open-to-all-citizens State could create adequate conditions for the return of Syrian refugees and their participation in elections and the rebuilding of the country.

Last but not least, let us not forget that the key to an effective and inclusive reconciliation process in Syria is delivering justice for the victims. Holding the perpetrators of the grave crimes committed accountable remains the sine qua non condition for achieving lasting peace.

With regard to Libya, Poland underscores the important role of the United Nations in facilitating a Libyan-led political solution to the challenges the country is facing. Therefore, we fully support the comprehensive and thoughtful engagement of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Ghassan Salamé, to facilitate the process of national reconciliation in Libya.

I would like to underline that Poland has always strongly supported all initiatives aimed at stabilization and strengthening peace and security in the Middle East. For that reason, we have kept the Middle East peace process high on our agenda.

On the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, we believe that the revitalization of the Middle East Quartet and increased United Nations involvement are steps in the right direction. A negotiated two-State solution and resolving final-status issues, including Jerusalem, settlements, the Palestinian refugees, borders and security arrangements, still remain a realistic way to fulfil the legitimate aspirations of both parties and achieve long-term peace.

We condemn all acts of terror and incitement to violence, including rocket-firing into Israel, and we call on all parties to meet their obligations under international humanitarian law, including protecting civilians and the proportionate use of force.

We reiterate once again that both the Israelis and the Palestinians have a right to live in peace and safety. We should strive to strengthen cooperation with the countries of the region, especially Egypt and Jordan, which have a real impact on the de-escalation of tensions in Israeli-Palestinian relations.

With regard to Iraq, we have always been supportive of the reconstruction and development efforts undertaken by the Iraqi Government and international partners, which range from humanitarian assistance, investment and private sector development, military cooperation and cultural heritage conservation. We strongly believe that those efforts should be accompanied by promoting inclusiveness and reconciliation among all components of Iraqi society, based on justice and accountability, the rule of law, respect for human rights, tolerance and peaceful coexistence among all religious and ethnic communities in Iraq.

We welcome the progress made in relations between Baghdad and Erbil and in the holding of parliamentary elections in May. We call on all political actors to resolve electoral disputes through the established legal channels and to cooperate constructively in the swift formation of a new, inclusive Government that would work towards political, economic and social reforms and further advance stabilization and reconstruction. We would also like to congratulate all Iraqi citizens who took responsibility for determining the future of their country by casting their votes.

With regard to Yemen, we are deeply alarmed by the continued deterioration of the humanitarian and security situation in the country. We emphatically stress the importance of the full and sustained opening of all Yemen's ports, including Hudeidah and Saleef ports, to all commercial and humanitarian imports, including food, fuel and medical supplies. We urge all parties to fully respect the principles of international humanitarian law and to ensure the protection of civilians.

There is no military solution to the conflict in Yemen. We call for the resumption of the United Nations-facilitated intra-Yemeni inclusive political process, while reaffirming our strong support for the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, Mr. Martin Griffiths. We call on all parties to engage constructively with his efforts. We reiterate the necessity of the full implementation of all aspects of the arms embargo, as required under the Security Council resolutions. We condemn the ballistic missile attacks by the Houthis against Saudi Arabia.

On Iran, we believe that it is in our common interests to stabilize the situation in the Middle East, reduce tensions in the region and, most important, prevent further proliferation of nuclear weapons. In our view, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) is an important step towards achieving one such objective — nuclear non-proliferation. Moreover, it has become an important element of the global non-proliferation architecture. The JCPOA does not explicitly prohibit the development of delivery systems or address the question of Iranian influence in the region, which some countries perceive as negative.

In that connection, Iran should refrain from actions that are not in the spirit of the JCPOA and that could undermine the implementation of the commitments under the Plan of Action. That is why Poland shares the concerns about Iranian activities undertaken contrary to the provisions of annex B to resolution 2231 (2015), as meticulously reported by the Secretary-General.

In conclusion, let me stress the necessity of maintaining the unity of the Council on the question of peace and security in the Middle East. We believe that more needs to be done by all of us, in particular regional actors, to find lasting peaceful solutions to all regional conflicts and challenges.

Mr. Esono Mbengono (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I would like to welcome the presence of Mr. Sergey Vershinin, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. We also welcome the presence of the Secretary-General. Equatorial Guinea very much appreciates the convening of this meeting by the Russian Federation because it allows us to analyse the situation in the Middle East and North Africa impartially.

The overall situation in the Middle East and North Africa greatly influences the stability and security in other regions of the world. Achieving peace and stability in those regions should therefore become the foremost priority of the international community. The complexity of the situation lies in the fact that it involves political, religious, ethnic and economic aspects. The most direct repercussions are seen in human tragedies, terrorist threats, migration crises and so on, which, moreover, also transcend the borders of the areas directly affected.

The importance of meetings such as today's lies in the fact that they give us an opportunity to at least recall that such problems exist and that the Security Council, which is mandated to find viable and common solutions to issues, is expected to do its utmost to find lasting solutions wherever peace and security in the world are threatened. I believe that I am right in saying that the peoples of the Middle East and North Africa pin their hopes for peace, security and stability on action by the Security Council. Implementing and achieving a lasting and satisfactory resolution of conflicts may be complex. However, the Security Council is the most appropriate body to undertake that complex task.

The continuation of many of the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa is today fuelled not only by the differences of the parties to the conflict but also by the lack of a common position on the part of the international actors with influence in the region. My delegation therefore urges the members of the Security Council to come closer together and to seek common ground so that the Council can facilitate and promote work towards a lasting resolution of such issues. The situation in the Middle East, specifically the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, has continued for more than 70 years, with all its ups and downs and complexities. We have seen many victims, destruction and so on. So much violence has not led to anything positive. However, the only viable solution is for the parties to sit at the negotiating table and seek a political solution to their differences. That solution means the establishment of two States — one Palestinian and the other Israeli — living side by side in peace. Both parties must respect each other's right to exist. The relevant Security Council resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative are the legal instruments that support such proposals.

The Libyan crisis, which has already had a negative impact on the southern part of its territory, since its repercussions have further exacerbated the ongoing problems in those areas. There has also been a negative impact on the northern part of the country in the form

of migration crises that European countries face today. The worst aspect is the human trafficking that we are seeing. It is positive to note that the Libyan political actors are now seeking to resolve such problems through a political process, which, we hope, will be successful.

The Syrian crisis has also lasted for a number of years, with all its complexities. The suffering must come to an end. The Syrians themselves must be able to find and decide upon the best solution for their country, clearly with the support of the international community, by which I mean the Security Council. As the Secretary-General underscored this morning, everyone's wish is to see a democratic and strong Syria that can fulfil its clear potential in peace.

The numbers of people fleeing from such conflicts are becoming increasingly problematic. Today we see how Syrian refugees flee to neighbouring countries and beyond. It is impossible to contain the humanitarian consequences as a result of the lack of political solutions. What is needed is a political solution that puts an end to that human suffering. The neighbouring countries hosting millions of Syrians deserve our praise. We would also urge the Syrian stakeholders to continue the dialogue, however difficult it may be.

Long-term conflicts, such as that of Yemen, Lebanon and Iraq, where the use of weapons has claimed numerous human lives, as well as causing great material damage and forced displacement, must be dealt with under international human rights law. The adoption of local measures of partial and limited scope is not the answer. The solution is consistent and coordinated international efforts. We believe that all such conflicts should be resolved through direct and frank negotiations.

Terrorism has been a common denominator of all the crises, both in North Africa and in the Middle East. In that regard, the international community must remain united and combat that scourge, which has only aggravated the human tragedy in that region. As the Ambassador of Ethiopia emphasized this morning, it is pleasing to note that the threat posed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant in the region has significantly decreased.

The situation in the Middle East and North Africa is not a coincidence but the result of history and reflects structural problems that cannot be explained only by internal situations. Many such problems have been inherited from the past. Resolving the problems facing us requires establishing a more democratic global structure where there are no double standards in the pursuit of solutions. The search for solutions should never be confused with interference in the internal affairs of countries. The sovereignty of the States in question must always be respected. A poor analysis of foreign situations and wrong decisions have unnecessarily complicated many conflicts facing us today. None of those conflicts has a military solution. We continue to believe that the United Nations must play a fundamental role through all its mechanisms to seek lasting solutions to such issues. Bias and groups have no place in the various conflicts.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, Mr. President, we would like to welcome the fact that you are presiding over this meeting. We would also like to welcome the Secretary-General and thank him for his participation and for his valuable briefing.

We thank you, Sir, for selecting the topic of today's debate and for the concept note (S/2018/524, annex), which highlights many aspects of the conflicts from which several countries suffer in the Middle East and North Africa. Throughout history, the region has made great and valuable contributions to human civilization. It continues to hold geographic and historic significance and is rich in natural resources and waterways. It has strategic and vital significance to international security and the global economy.

Since the beginning of the year, issues related to the Middle East and North Africa have accounted for 46 per cent of the Security Council's programme of work. We discuss those issues monthly and, at times, daily or weekly, as needed. The number of formal meetings and informal consultations held about them since the beginning of the year has reached 120. We have heard detailed briefings on the activities of peacekeeping operations and political missions.

The State of Kuwait supports the content of the concept note (S/2018/524, annex) with regard to the issue of the Palestinian question as a chronic crisis at the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The fact that the issue remains unresolved will have negative repercussions on the security and stability of the region as a whole. We would like to recall that this month marked half a century of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian and Arab territories.

Our position with regard to the Palestinian question and the Israeli occupation is principled and

constant. We need a just, comprehensive and lasting solution in accordance with resolutions of international legitimacy, the principle of land for peace, the Quartet road map and the Arab Peace Initiative, leading to the withdrawal of Israel from all occupied Arab territories and to establish two States to live side by side in peace along the 4 June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Palestine, while stressing the importance of a solution to the refugee issue, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

The solution to conflicts must be based on international law and the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, in particular non-interference in the internal affairs of countries and respect for their sovereignty. Dialogue and peaceful ways and means should be the best way to conflict resolution.

We would like to express our deep regret about the security, political and economic challenges in various countries of the region, which have undermined security and stability in the region and the world, in particular in Syria, Yemen and Libya. The State of Kuwait supports political solutions as outlined in Security Council resolutions and resolutions adopted by regional organizations, such as the League of Arab States and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, as a means to ending the suffering of the peoples and bolstering security and stability in those countries.

The State of Kuwait knows that such conflicts and disputes have remained unresolved and exacerbated feelings of disappointment and frustration among the peoples of the region. Therefore, efforts must be redoubled to reach a final and comprehensive settlement to those conflicts and achieve national reconciliation, in line with the aspirations of the peoples of the region pertaining to security, development and a free and dignified life.

We stress the importance of following up on the implementation of Security Council resolutions. If they remain unimplemented, conflicts will continue and become increasingly complex. That will also undermine the efficiency of the Security Council and its ability to carry out its responsibilities in accordance with the Charter. We believe the Security Council must go beyond its differences and remain united in its position and implement its resolutions so that it can carry out its historic and legal responsibility of maintaining international peace and security.

We recall paragraph 8 of resolution 598 (1987), which calls on the Secretary-General to consult with the countries of the region to put in place measures to enhance peace and stability in the region. We believe those measures should be based on the principles of international law governing relations among countries, including respect for good neighbourly relations, non-interference in the internal affairs of other States, respect for the sovereignty of countries and peaceful coexistence in order to achieve security and prosperity for the peoples of the region.

We believe that political, security, economic and social repercussions resulting from tensions and security instability were limited not only to the Middle East and North Africa, but they had also an impact on the world's continents in varying proportions. We see that in the spread of several phenomena such as terrorism, displacement, migration and human trafficking. They are all matters of concern to the Council and other United Nations entities, such as the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council.

Building and sustaining peace is a main goal of sustainable development. The State of Kuwait believes in the importance of the culture of peace and works to enhance respect for religious, sectarian, cultural and civilizational diversity. According to the Global Peace Index 2018, Kuwait ranked first in the Middle East and North Africa. That encourages us to continue our efforts and endeavours to operationalize the principles of the culture of peace, in particular our commitment to engaging in dialogue to resolve conflicts, respecting human rights and the rule of law, eradicating poverty and unemployment and raising awareness among peoples of their responsibilities in combating the root causes of terrorism and radicalization.

Despite our achievements and those of the rest of the international community to combat terrorism, it remains a challenge to international peace and security. We must therefore redouble our efforts in order to rid humankind of the evil that is terrorism. Terrorism has no religion. It targets civilians for the purpose of harming them and their property anywhere and anytime. Regardless of its motives, terrorism is despicable and is at variance with international humanitarian law and international human rights law. The State of Kuwait is part of the international coalition to combat terrorism and the so-called Da'esh. In addition to our efforts to combat terrorism and radicalization and cut off the sources of terrorism financing, we are working to

coordinate the efforts of the international community to combat terrorism and strengthen commitment to international treaties and relevant Security Council resolutions. Over the past two years Kuwait hosted five meetings in the context of the Global Coalition against Da'esh, and in November we will host a high-level international conference to review the Madrid principles, for we are committed to implementing Security Council resolutions, in particular resolution 2396 (2017).

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): I thank you, Mr. President, for organizing today's broader debate on a region that unfortunately makes up a very large portion of the agenda of the Security Council and on which members of the Council have been divided far too often.

I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his thought-provoking intervention earlier today on the situation in the Middle East and North Africa.

We align ourselves with the statement to be made later on behalf of the European Union.

Throughout history, the Middle East and North Africa have acted as a confluence for many of the world's peoples and religions and as a conduit for trade and human interaction for the benefit and advancement of the region and beyond. In the process, the region has gifted us an unrivalled wealth of history and culture. Today the Middle East and North Africa region is home to a vibrant young population striving to be active citizens in inclusive open societies and to build better futures for themselves and their fellow citizens, which brings great hope.

Yet many aspirations are still held back. Intensifying internal conflict and sectarian violence polarize countries across the region. Increasingly, conflicts in the Middle East are interlinked and there is a risk of regionalization, which could have global consequences. The goal to create a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the region, which has been supported by the Security Council, has not materialized. There have been setbacks in diplomatic efforts in that area. Sweden, together with the rest of the European Union, will continue to fully support the nuclear agreement with Iran and its implementation.

The challenges in the Middle East and North Africa are taking up an increasing portion of the Council's agenda. At the same time, it could be argued that in no other region has the Security Council been more divided or more flagrantly failed to live up to its responsibilities. During our time as an elected member, we have tried to bridge the divides and contribute to constructive, results-oriented discussions aimed at making a real difference on the ground. It was in that spirit that we hosted the Secretary-General's retreat in Sweden in April. We came away with a renewed sense of purpose and commitment to collective efforts. It is only by working together that we can shoulder the great responsibility that the Charter entrusts to the Council. The permanent members of the Council have a particular responsibility in this regard.

We must enhance our efforts for the millions of civilians affected by conflict who depend on us to uphold international law and ensure protection and humanitarian assistance for those most in need. The region is currently the scene of some of the worst humanitarian disasters in modern times. Every day, courageous humanitarian workers risk their lives to provide assistance to people in need. For that we are grateful, and we need to support them. The very system that we have built over decades to protect the most vulnerable in times of armed conflict is under threat. The principles and rules of international humanitarian law are frequently violated, including through indiscriminate attacks on civilians, civilian infrastructure and humanitarian workers, the inhuman and degrading treatment of detained persons and refusals to grant humanitarian access to people in need of assistance. Even the international prohibition against the use of chemical weapons has been violated. So far this has been allowed to happen with impunity, but that must change. We have a responsibility to ensure that the perpetrators of such crimes are brought to justice and held accountable.

Military strategies will not deliver sustainable peace. Only inclusive political solutions and peaceful settlements can end conflicts once and for all. The brutal war in Syria is well into its eighth year. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has gone unresolved for seven decades. The protracted conflict in Yemen has just escalated even further. The United Nations is the only international institution with the legitimacy and credibility to facilitate the political processes needed to end these conflicts. The leadership of the Secretary-General and the use of his good offices is essential. We in the Security Council must do all we can to provide him with the support, unity and backing that he and his Special Representatives need.

Regional and international dialogue and cooperation must be the primary means for peacefully resolving disputes. There is a need for a common framework in the Middle East for discussion and cooperation on issues of mutual interest and challenges, including security. The experience of other regional security arrangements, such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, including with the Paris Charter, could serve as a model, as several speakers have mentioned this morning. Such a framework should seek to establish common norms and a comprehensive and collaborative concept of security. More than anything, it could help build well-needed confidence and trust between all the countries in the region. Such a framework could also serve as an effective counterpart and partner for the United Nations in its efforts to prevent conflict and promote peace, much like in Africa, where the close cooperation of the United Nations with the continent's regional organization, the African Union, has proved essential.

The interconnected nature of the challenges we face make international and regional cooperation not only desirable but essential. Terrorism and violent extremism affect us all, and we must continue our joint efforts to fight them. That is an integral part of the Security Council's responsibility for maintaining international peace and security. For the fight against terrorism to have any chance of succeeding, it must always be conducted with full respect for international law, including humanitarian law and human rights, and can never be used as an excuse for indiscriminate warfare or the inhumane treatment of detainees.

As we continue to work to end the current crises, we must improve our ability to prevent new conflicts from developing, which means identifying and addressing conflict risks and drivers early, so that we can take early action to sustain peace and prevent conflict before emerges. These drivers include youth unemployment — more than half the population of the region is under 25 years old — chronic underdevelopment and the lack of economic opportunities. However, as we agreed when we adopted resolution 2419 (2018), on youth, peace and security, earlier this month (see S/PV.8277), young people can be a powerful force for peace and prosperity. And women also have a powerful role to play in building the region's future. There are established links between gender inequality, political instability and underdevelopment. The full and effective participation of women at all levels is necessary to achieve stability and sustainable development.

Indeed, we know all too well the drivers of conflict, but that means we also know how to prevent them. It includes building strong, unified, tolerant, open and free societies, where respect for human rights and legitimate and credible governance institutions prevail. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development represents a framework for addressing the root causes of conflict and is one of the most powerful tools we have for economic and social development in the Middle East and North Africa, as in every other region.

I started my remarks today recalling the cultural and historical legacy that the Middle East and North African region has given to the world. Today's challenges may be testing the resolve of the international community and the strength of our system for collective security, but they are not insurmountable. Meeting them will require a determined effort on the part of the countries of the region, as well as a willingness to compromise and an unwavering commitment to the principle on which our international system is built. It is a shared responsibility, not least for the Security Council, and we have to shoulder it too. In the words of former Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld, "only he deserves power who every day justifies it".

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I would now like to make some concluding remarks in my capacity as the representative of the Russian Federation.

In his most recent report (S/2018/614) on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), the Secretary-General rightly points out that regional conflicts are interconnected, something that many other speakers have talked about today. He also says that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is iconic, and its persistence helps to fuel the extremist agenda. I fully agree with Mr. Guterres when he says that is precisely why it is critically important to create conditions that will enable us to bring the parties back to substantive negotiations. In that regard, I would once again like to recall our initiative to hold an Israeli-Palestinian summit in Russia and our proposal to send a Security Council mission to the region.

The effort to mobilize the Middle East Quartet of international mediators is becoming ever more pertinent. We firmly believe that the starting point for our collective work should be through ensuring strict adherence by all to the international legal foundations

formulated by the Security Council for resolving this issue, refraining from taking unilateral steps, including building settlements in the occupied territories, and ending the violence. That is the only way we will be able to open up the prospects for a two-State solution by negotiating a package of final status issues. The humanitarian situation in Gaza must be improved and under the control of a legitimate Palestinian Government. The efforts to unite Palestinians must also be intensified.

The conflicts in Syria and Yemen are also awaiting lasting settlements of their own. Russia and the other guarantors of the Astana process have made a genuine contribution to stabilizing the situation in Syria and ensuring that it will not fall to terrorists. We now have an opportunity to focus on the political process under the auspices of the United Nations in Geneva, for which we need constructive efforts on the part of all the external stakeholders. At the same time, as stipulated in the decisions of the Security Council and various international formats, we must continue to relentlessly combat terrorism until it is completely stamped out in Syria.

I have listened carefully and respectfully to all of those who have spoken so far, including to the representatives of the United Kingdom and the United States, who expressed particular concern about what is happening in the south-western de-escalation area in Syria. In fact, active peace negotiations are under way there with the opposition groups that have rejected the terrorists, while the fight against the terrorists themselves continues. I want to emphasize that the Russian Federation is firmly committed to meeting its obligations, including those related to the ceasefire regime. No one has done more than Russia and its co-guarantors of the Astana process to bring about a ceasefire and reduce the level of violence, and certainly none of the countries whose money and weapons give aid to illegal armed groups.

I would like to point out that the de-escalation areas, including the one in south-western Syria, which Russia set up in coordination with the United States and Jordan, were certainly not created in order to break up a State Member of the United Nations or perpetuate the presence of terrorists there. However, I regret to say that we have been compelled to conclude that at the moment more than 40 per cent of the south-western area's territory continues to be controlled by Jabhat Al-Nusra and the Islamic State in the Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), which, as we are all well aware, have been designated terrorist groups by the Organization. There can be no ceasefire between us and them. At the same time, we have to once again regretfully point out that in the year that has passed since the establishment of the de-escalation zone in south-western Syria, the United States, in spite of the commitments it undertook, has done nothing to support the fight against the terrorists there.

On the Yemen crisis, I reiterate that there can be no military solution to the conflict. We can reach a long-term settlement only by taking into account the opinions of all of its participants. Russia is maintaining contact with all the opposing sides and assisting the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, Mr. Martin Griffiths. There is no question that special attention needs to be paid to resolving the severe humanitarian and food crisis there.

Significant international efforts are required to get the political process in Libya moving so as to unite the country, create unified governmental institutions and put an end to internecine clashes. Much more also remains to be done to help Iraq overcome the consequences of the war with ISIL and achieve sustainable national reconciliation.

In conclusion, I would like to express the hope that today's debate will contribute to finding ways to strengthen peace and stability in the Middle East and North Africa.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Ms. Lodhi (Pakistan): Let start by thanking the Russian presidency for convening this important debate. We also thank the Secretary-General for his insightful and frank briefing on the situation in the Middle East.

As our Swedish colleague reminded us just a short while ago, the region has historically been the cradle of civilization. But today the Middle East is in deep turmoil. The geostrategic landscape of the region is dominated by a complex interplay of multiple and intersecting fault lines. Competing interests and divergences among major regional Powers have further fuelled instability and pushed the region into a vortex of turmoil and violence. Reconciliation among the major regional Powers is necessary to address the growing tensions and turmoil. Already, a combustible mix has been

exacerbated by big-Power rivalries, raising the danger of wider conflict, with far-reaching consequences.

As rightly noted in the concept note (S/2018/524, annex), the situation necessitates a comprehensive approach to effectively address the many challenges — an approach that takes into account the underlying regional and historical contexts of each conflict and that is consistent with the norms of international law. Anything less would not work, for we know all too well that unilateral measures driven by narrow interests and false assumptions have brought only greater suffering to the people of the region.

Worryingly, instead of abandoning those flawed policies, attempts are still being made by some external actors to shape the region according to their own political preferences. Nowhere is that unfortunate spectacle more apparent than in Palestine. The two-State solution is tragically being dismantled in full sight of the international community. The latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/614) also attests to a familiar pattern of systematic abuse of Palestinians at the hands of the illegal Israeli occupation.

Inaction by the Security Council is also continuing to worsen the situation in Palestine. As the Palestinians observed their Great Return March, the killing fields of Gaza were drenched in the blood of over 130 innocent Palestinians. Yet the Security Council stood as a bystander to the plight of those long-suffering Palestinian people. That represented a dereliction by the Council of its primary responsibility of maintaining international peace and security. For the Palestinian issue is not a by-product of conflict in the Middle East, it is the primary source of instability in the region. On 13 June, the General Assembly was called upon to reaffirm to the Palestinians their right to safety and protection — a right expressly recognized by several Security Council resolutions — which the Council had failed to endorse on 1 June.

Our discussion on the protection of civilians is not taking place in isolation; it is a fundamental tenet of the prevention-centric and rights-oriented work that we carry out at the United Nations. It is therefore no coincidence that the General Assembly is, at this very moment, also holding a formal plenary meeting on the responsibility to protect (see A/72/PV.100). Our words during this debate will be weighed against the actions that we take for the protection needs of all civilian populations, including the people of Palestine. We must not allow the plight of the Palestinian people to be betrayed at the altar of narrow and myopic political interests.

The raging fires of conflict across the region show no signs of abating. Amid this pervasive gloom, the successful conduct of the parliamentary elections in Iraq last month marks a new chapter in Iraqi democracy. It also serves as a successful model of inclusive and representative political participation.

As the conflict in Syria enters its eighth year, the need for an intra-Syrian process of political engagement is as urgent and important as ever. As much as progress may be slow, every step forward on that path is a gain for peace in the country.

The grim situation in Yemen also necessitates a political outcome. The search for a political solution must be accelerated. Over 22 million people in the country are in need of immediate and urgent humanitarian assistance. That fact alone reinforces the need for such a political settlement.

The edifice of peace cannot be built without the foundation of justice. We cannot expect some to reap the dividends of peace when others are forcibly deprived of the fruits of justice. As self-evident as it is, that fallacy remains at the core of the instability in the region, for peace is surely not a zero-sum game. We are all insecure if some of us are vulnerable. The road to peace in the Middle East lies in a just and fair settlement of the Palestinian issue. That is an objective reality, not a partisan assessment. The test of our commitment to peace in the region lies in that acknowledgment and our ability to act on it. It is time to stand up and be counted.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Italy.

Mr. Biagini (Italy): At the outset, I would like to thank the Russian presidency for organizing this debate. A regular, comprehensive review of the situation in the Middle East and North Africa — a region with truly remarkable potential and a unique cultural heritage that must be protected and preserved, but which is marred by persistent instability — is a welcome and necessary initiative.

As a Mediterranean country, Italy is directly affected by such instability. For that reason, the security challenge in the Mediterranean was a centrepiece of our Security Council presidency last November.

We align ourselves with the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union.

Our objective must be to chart a common way forward that emphasizes the pressing need for stability as a strategic imperative and that opens the door to building a positive agenda of shared peace, pluralism and prosperity and inclusion.

In Libya, our foremost priority is to assist and support the advancement of the Libyan-owned political and reconciliation process, with the goal of ending the transition through the electoral process. In that context, it is of the utmost importance that all the relevant stakeholders remain fully aligned and unified in their support to Special Representative Ghassan Salamé and his action plan.

We strongly support the aspirations of the Libyan people for stability, democracy and national reconciliation. While there has been good progress towards those goals, the road ahead is still challenging, and it is clear that there are no shortcuts. The threat of terrorism remains a key concern, as we saw from the heinous attacks against the High National Electoral Commission in Tripoli last month and, most recently, in Benghazi, which we strongly condemn.

We are following with extreme concern the evolution of the security environment on the ground in Sebha, a crucial area in our collective effort to address the issue of the trafficking in human beings, and in the oil crescent, where clashes may put at risk many important oil facilities. We are particularly worried about the situation in Derna. We join the United Nations in calling for an immediate ceasefire, in order to provide humanitarian support to the population.

Preparations for elections should be advanced by following a step-by-step and inclusive approach, first and foremost by putting in place the necessary political, technical and legislative measures for success. We encourage all Libyan political actors to converge on a shared vision for the future, based on a common understanding of the constitutional framework, electoral reform and a pledge to respect the legitimacy of electoral outcomes.

We also continue to work in close partnership with the Libyan authorities to tackle the scourge of illicit human trafficking and disrupt its business model. Italy has been largely alone, together with Libya, in bearing the burden of those flows and saving countless lives at sea. That is why we are tirelessly advocating for a truly collective response to the security challenges in the Mediterranean, starting with illegal migration. That is not a temporary emergency or a matter for coastal countries alone; it is a strategic imperative, first and foremost for the European Union and its member States, to finally join together, with true unity of purpose and a sense of shared responsibility.

Advancing the collective fight against traffickers also requires working together to strengthen the capacity of Governments in countries of origin and transit to control their territory and borders. The United Nations system has a key role to play in that regard. We have been consistently working in partnership with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organization for Migration to enhance their role on the ground, ensure protection and direct assistance to migrants and refugees, improve conditions in centres and increase assisted voluntary returns and resettlements.

Turning to the greater Middle East, in Lebanon the holding of parliamentary elections is an important step to reinforcing Lebanese democratic institutions. But the path towards stability is still long. In addition to our role within the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, we promote the International Support Group for Lebanon road map to support the country's institutions and security forces and, in that spirit, we hosted the second Rome ministerial conference last March.

In neighbouring Syria, we continue to encourage a genuine commitment by the Syrian partners and international stakeholders to meaningfully engage in the framework of the United Nations-led Geneva process.

We are also strongly committed to keeping the goal of a fair and lasting peace in the Middle East high on the international agenda, and we underline the pressing need for direct negotiations between the parties, leading to a two-State solution. The current situation in Gaza is deeply alarming, both from a humanitarian perspective and because of its detrimental impact on the prospects for peace.

In Yemen, where the situation is rapidly and alarmingly deteriorating, we remain diplomatically engaged in promoting regional dialogue as a tool to advance the prospects for de-escalation, and we support the United Nations Special Envoy's efforts to revitalize the political process.

Lastly, we reiterate our conviction that the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action represents an important element of the global non-proliferation architecture and a pillar of regional security. We remain committed to the full and effective implementation of the agreement and encourage Iran to do the same.

The challenges before us are daunting and complex, but that should not deter us. Charting a successful path towards enduring peace and security in the Middle East and North Africa will have the potential to project stability and prosperity across the three continents.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the observer of Palestine.

Ms. Abdelhady-Nasser (Palestine): We thank the Russian presidency for convening this timely debate to address the root causes of the conflicts and serious challenges facing us in the Middle East and North Africa region, where the Palestine question remains at the core of our instability and is the crux of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Multilateral efforts are urgently needed in the region to promote the realization of a just, comprehensive and lasting solution, firmly rooted in international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions.

The tragedy inflicted on the Palestinian people remains a source of intense anger, despair, mistrust and fear, particularly across the Arab and Muslim world; it impairs perceptions about the international system's fairness and fuels toxic narratives of double standards, constituting a formidable force to be reckoned with.

Seventy years since Al-Nakba and 51 years since the Israeli occupation began, in 1967, the sense of injustice has only intensified, deepening with every veto that absolves Israel, the occupying Power, of its crimes, as again happened on 1 June (see S/PV.8274). That has been matched by an equivalent decrease in confidence in the Security Council's authority, as attempts to de-escalate violent eruptions and uphold human rights and humanitarian principles, including to protect civilians and advance peace efforts, are repeatedly obstructed.

The conflict's protraction, chiefly due to a systemic lack of accountability for Israel's violations across decades, has entrenched a destructive culture of impunity in the region, which has weakened international norms and fuelled cyclical crises, ensuring an environment ripe for further proliferation of conflict, with far-reaching political, social, economic and security impacts.

The human cost has been immense, with profound insecurity, suffering and humanitarian disasters affecting the region and beyond, including as a result of the forced displacement of millions of civilians, among them over 5.5 million Palestine refugees. Increased poverty and the mutation of conflicts has allowed for the spread of extremism and terror, incited religious conflict and undermined the potential of religion as a force for social good. Those who deny or dismiss those facts further fuel those phenomena and impede the efforts to stabilize our region and find lasting solutions that can ensure peace and security for all.

The Security Council has the duty and the capacity to remedy this situation and launch a new reality in the Middle East, benefiting all countries of the region, neighbouring countries and the goal of global peace. That must begin with action to address the crises before us, including in the besieged Gaza Strip, and justly resolve the Palestine question as a whole. The parameters of that solution are well known and are enshrined in Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. On that basis, there remains a solid international consensus and responsibility to act. In that connection, we recall the most recent resolution on that issue, resolution 2334 (2016), and the Council's clear call for collective action as it, inter alia, urged

> "the intensification and acceleration of international and regional diplomatic efforts and support aimed at achieving, without delay, a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid terms of reference, including the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map and an end to the Israeli occupation that began in 1967 " (*resolution 2334 (2016), para. 9*).

The Security Council's continued failure to advance such demands is a direct result of both Israel's intransigence and disrespect and the paralysis caused in the Council by the use of the veto by one permanent member. However, that cannot be accepted as the norm. The Security Council must uphold the primacy of international law and implement its resolutions. Only within the law and through multilateralism can a just and lasting solution for the Palestinian-Israeli conflict be found.

We condemn all unilateral measures, whether colonial or otherwise, rejecting schemes to illegally impose facts on the ground and forcibly impose unjust solutions. Moreover, there is no military solution to our conflict or any of the region's conflicts. We reject the politicization of humanitarian work, as has been egregiously done to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. We call for the empowerment of women and youth in any peace initiative, and we reject attempts to falsely equate the just cause of Palestine with terrorism. We have publicly aligned ourselves with the global front against terrorism.

We have never sought to force a solution, as the occupying Power and its supporters do; we have simply sought the law's application to peacefully end the conflict and achieve our rights. That is all we have asked for at every juncture: what we are entitled to as a people, as per the law and not beyond what is legislated in United Nations resolutions.

For 30 years, since agreeing to the two-State framework, we have made historic and painful compromises and engaged in good faith in every peace initiative and endless negotiations, adhering to a peaceful, political and non-violent path. Despite many setbacks, we remain firmly convinced that the Charter of the United Nations, the law and United Nations resolutions will be the guarantors of a just solution that resolves all final-status issues.

Any viable peace agreement must ensure the realization of the Palestinian people's inalienable rights and the independence of a sovereign, contiguous State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side in peace with the State of Israel within secure and internationally recognized borders and based on the pre-1967 lines, as well as a just solution for the Palestine refugees, as per resolution 194 (III) and the Arab Peace Initiative.

We reiterate our call for a multilateral, political process to achieve those objectives, once again reaffirming in this Chamber our readiness to engage, including in an international peace conference. We urge the Security Council, based on its Council mandate, to call on the Quartet members — the Russian Federation, the United States, the European Union and the United Nations as a whole — to uphold their obligations and exert every possible effort to that end, in cooperation with, and supported by, all regional partners concerned, the League of Arab States, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and all peace-loving nations, with the vital good offices of the Secretary-General.

Only through such a collective drive for peace can we end the Israeli occupation and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, fulfil the decades-long promise of freedom, independence and justice for the Palestinian people and truly contribute to peace and security in the Middle East and North Africa and to the establishment of a more just, stable and peaceful world.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Egypt.

Mr. Edrees (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank the delegation of the Russian Federation for convening this important debate. I would also like to express our appreciation to the Secretary-General for his briefing.

We have carefully listened to the statements made during this important debate, which comes at an exceptional time, considering the dangerous historical juncture at which the Middle East has arrived since many wears. This turning point is characterized by an unprecedented threat to the security, stability, unity and territorial integrity of the countries of the region. The situation is further worsened by the attempts of some parties to undermine the concept of the nation State as recognized by international law and the Charter of the United Nations, including through efforts to establish sectarian allegiances on doctrinal, racial or tribal grounds to create zones of influence that serve the narrow interests of some parties from within and outside the region.

There is no doubt that the selective manner in which the Security Council has addressed the key issues of the Middle East, as well as its evident double standards, has significantly contributed to the degree of deterioration and instability that the region has reached.

It is not my intention here to separately address each one of the multitude of crises in the region, since they are well known to all and are being discussed in a great amount of detail at the relevant meetings of the Security Council. In fact, it might be better to utilize this meeting to assess the situation holistically and attempt to adopt a comprehensive approach.

Everybody knows that reaching a just and sustainable solution to the Palestinian question, on the

basis of the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and past agreements, remains the utmost priority and a necessary condition for achieving peace and security in the region. The continued occupation and the persistent unilateral measures that violate international legitimacy are the most prominent reasons for terrorism and chaos. Moreover, ignoring the Palestinian question is helping some parties to exploit it in order to achieve internal political gains and cover up negative regional policies. Furthermore, the major international Powers' blind eye to Israel's refusal to accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons makes the region vulnerable to conflicts, arms races and pretexts for foreign intervention.

In that context, I would like to highlight an outstanding model that was set by Egypt after reaching a peace treaty with Israel, about 40 years ago following five consecutive wars. Perhaps the first lesson to be taken from that experience is that peace would not have been possible without Egypt regaining all of its lands and the reciprocation of specific political and security guarantees. That proves that the roots of conflict in the Middle East are neither religious nor ethnic and that the Arab-Israeli conflict is, in its essence, a political one. A sustainable settlement is therefore possible through just and balanced solutions. In fact, dealing with this conflict as if it were an inevitable religious confrontation will only perpetuate it.

The second lesson is that reaching a peace treaty will not prevent Egypt from continuously striving to restore the rights of the Palestinian people and support the liberation of the various occupied Arab territories. Achieving peace between Egypt and Israel alone is not enough to establish comprehensive and sustainable peace. The rest of the occupied Arab territories must be liberated and the Palestinian people's suffering and the apartheid that they are facing, which represents a shameful stain upon the face of humankind, must be put to an end. The international community and its institutions have failed for decades to implement numerous resolutions, whether those related to Palestine and other occupied Arab territories, or those on the establishment of a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East.

The region is witnessing a persistent attack on the concept of the modern nation State, particularly since the historic invasion of Iraq in 2003. Furthermore, some parties are intensifying their systematic efforts to build networks of doctrinal and ethnic allegiances. Some States have even engaged in supplying terrorists and illegal groups with weapons to undermine the authority of certain Governments and threaten neighbouring countries, which constitutes a recipe for spreading chaos, further instability and more conflicts, as well as a serious threat to security and stability at the regional and international levels.

The continuation of those policies will definitely change the current proxy wars, which are exacerbated by fierce competition among some international and regional parties over creating zones of influence, into direct, protracted military confrontations. That may haunt the future of entire generations of the region, worsen economic and social crises and the waves of refugees and displaced people and risk the sudden turning of some regional conflicts into global confrontations.

Egypt therefore calls upon all parties to take serious action to immediately amend those policies and return to the principles of international law and the Charter, without any double standards. Egypt is proud of its honourable track record and its commitment to avoid initiating aggression or resorting to the use of force, except in self-defence, or engaging in supporting, funding or arming terrorist groups, illegal organizations and secessionist entities with the aim of undermining the sovereignty of its neighbours or achieving short-term interests at the expense of stability and security in the long term.

Furthermore, Egypt demands that other parties commit to those same principles, in order to preserve the future of the peoples of the region and avoid bloodshed. In this regard, the President of Egypt has on numerous occasions, foremost among which was that of his statement at the beginning of the seventy-second session of the General Assembly last September (see A/72/PV.5), presented Egypt's vision for reaching a comprehensive and integrated solution to the crises in the region on the basis of these principles.

There is no doubt that the United Nations remains the forum most capable of launching effective international cooperation. In that respect, Egypt expresses its readiness in principle to consider the establishment of a mechanism similar to that referred to in the proposal contained in the concept note (S/2018/524, annex), submitted by Russia, at this meeting regarding the launching of a regional and institutional dialogue similar to the Helsinki Process,

which contributed to creating a stable and sustainable security architecture in Europe. There is in fact no alternative to the engagement of the countries of the region in direct dialogue and negotiations under United Nations auspices.

As a first step, we propose that the Secretary-General, given his authority and impartiality, invite the States of the region to a conference, with the participation of the permanent members of the Security Council, to negotiate the establishment of a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, which could pave the way for the design of a specific work plan to establish a sustained system of political and security arrangements that could achieve equal security for all States in the region without discrimination. This would in turn allow for all issues in the region to be addressed in the framework of an integrated package, thereby creating a climate conducive to confidence-building and the resolution of existing crises.

Parallel to this negotiating track, there is an urgent need for all effective regional and international parties to unconditionally commit themselves to the principles and objectives of the Charter of the United Nations and of international law, specifically the following principles: first, full respect for the sovereignty of States, refraining from interference in their domestic affairs under any pretext and refraining from the threat or use of force; secondly, denouncing and condemning all forms of terrorism and committing to combating it by supporting the efforts of the Governments of the relevant States upon their request; thirdly, denouncing all sectarian policies, prohibiting any form of support for illegal groups or organizations and the supply of weapons to non-State actors without official authorizations from authorities of the recipient State, while recognizing the exclusive right of legitimate Governments to use force in order to enforcing law and order on their territories; and, fourthly, upholding the principles of citizenship, equality, the rule of law and human rights.

The commitment of all parties to those principles and their engagement in serious negotiations on the establishment of an integrated system on the elimination of weapons of mass destruction, together with sustainable and balanced arms-control arrangements, would put an end to the arms race and address all non-proliferation concerns in a comprehensive manner. The continued imbalance in military capabilities does not allow for an environment conducive to confidence-building and negotiations on other regional conflicts, in isolation from this issue, which represents an existential threat and puts the region at risk of an escalating arms race and external military intervention.

Finally, we certainly look forward to the constructive engagement of all parties in a negotiation process under the auspices of the United Nations, thereby sparing future generations from the scourge of wars and destruction. I welcome the Secretary-General's agenda issued few weeks ago on disarmament, while expressing his commitment to establishing a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East. This calls for a clear plan of action to establish such a zone within a specific time frame, in accordance with the 1995 Review and Extension Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, which is an integral part of the Treaty's indefinite extension package.

Many regions of the world have managed to overcome decades-long wars and conflicts and to establish sustained peace and cooperation. This would not have been achievable in the absence of clear rules for coexistence, cooperation and respect for diversity and differences. We are confident that the States of the Middle East can set such rules, and we hope that our discussion today will set the stage for concrete, practical and serious steps to be taken in the right direction.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Sinirlioğlu (Turkey): I wish to thank you, Mr. President, for having organized this timely debate on the Middle East and North Africa. The future of the Middle East should remain a major part of our discussions on the maintenance of peace and security globally. Events in this region have ramifications worldwide, and Turkey's own future is bound to this region not only by the forces of economics and security, as is the case for several Member States, but also by geography and a long common history and culture.

Addressing the root causes of the conflict is an essential ingredient of achieving long-term stability and prosperity in the Middle East. The countries of the region consist of multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-sectarian societies. We all must denounce divisive politics along ethnic, religious and sectarian fault lines and embrace multiculturalism and inclusivity. We need to strengthen the culture of peaceful coexistence and to

hear the legitimate aspirations of the young and dynamic populations of the region. This is our best chance for the long-term settlement of existing conflicts, at the heart of which lie the issue of Palestine.

The latest developments in Palestine remind us once again of the urgency of revitalizing the peace process. We reiterate once again that the status quo is not sustainable. A two-State solution remains the only way towards a just, comprehensive and lasting peace. The establishment of an independent State of Palestine within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, is long overdue. Respecting the established parameters is the only way in which we can ensure security for both sides. Efforts in the opposite direction tarnish the credibility of any peace plan or initiative.

The lack of a viable peace process continues to inflame tensions and to give rise to new cycles of violence. The international community, in particular the Council, cannot turn a blind eye to such blatant disregard of international law. It must take action and ensure the implementation of its own resolutions.

The situation in Gaza, which is on the brink of collapse after the decade-long blockade, continues to be deeply worrying. This tragedy is compounded by an acute financial-resource gap in the budget of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). It is our collective moral duty to support the Agency. Turkey announced an additional $10 million for UNRWA's programme budget and increased its in-kind donation. I hope that this afternoon's pledging conference will provide an avenue to discuss concrete ways to address the Agency's dramatic financial situation.

While our assistance to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinians will continue, we should spare no effort to achieve a just and lasting solution to the conflict. We are also continuing our efforts to calm the situation on the ground in Syria and to advance the political process. Turkey has been actively contributing to the counter-terrorism and stabilization efforts in that respect. The operations that we have carried out, namely, Euphrates Shield and Olive Branch, cleared more than 4,000 square kilometres of terrorists. So far more than 160,000 Syrians have voluntarily returned to their homeland. In the same spirit, we have stepped up our humanitarian efforts, particularly in Afrin. We have been providing continuous humanitarian aid and fundamental health services to the region in order to prevent civilian suffering.

In Syria, a viable and credible political solution based on United Nations parameters remains the only way to eventually build a democratic, pluralist and non-sectarian country, maintaining its political unity and territorial integrity. We will continue to do our utmost towards that end. Despite the significant military gains achieved in the field against Da'esh, the socioeconomic destruction across Syria and Iraq still needs to be addressed. This is crucial to eliminate fertile ground for new generations of extremists and their activities.

The international community should increase its humanitarian assistance in response to the humanitarian crises in the region, at least until these countries get back on their feet.

We must acknowledge that a strategy based solely on the narrow pursuit of national interests has not succeeded in the Middle East and never will. A strategy that fails to speak to the broader aspirations of ordinary people will only feed the suspicion that has festered for years that the foreign Powers pursue their interests at the expense of local populations.

The support of the international community for the reconstruction and development of conflict-riddled countries remains a tool essential to avoiding this perception and preventing a relapse into new conflicts. The safe and sustainable return of refugees and internally displaced persons, as well as the reconstruction and rehabilitation of basic infrastructure in areas liberated from terrorist organizations such as Da'esh and the Kurdish Workers Party/Partiya Yekitiya Demokrat-People's Protection Units (PKK/PYD-YPG) are important priorities in this endeavour. The Turkish experience in this context is particularly instructive. Syrians have voluntarily started to return to their homes in areas that we liberated from Da'esh. Lately, we are also seeing thousands return to Afrin, which we cleared from PKK/PYD-YPG through Operation Olive Branch. Turkey has been exerting every effort to restore normalcy in these territories by rebuilding essential infrastructure and providing basic utilities, food and medicine, as well as security, while at the same time establishing local governance.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that Turkey will continue to deploy all efforts towards de-escalation on the ground and will advance the political processes

to find solutions to the protracted conflicts in the region and to address the aspirations of the people of the Middle East for a better future.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Greece.

Mrs. Theofili (Greece): Allow me at the outset to thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this debate, since the plethora of crises and ever-increasing challenges in the Middle East and North Africa are of great interest to and effect, directly or indirectly, all of us.

We would like to align ourselves with the statement of the European Union, to be delivered later, and to make some additional remarks.

In recent years, the Middle East and North Africa region has turned into a zone of endemic conflict, with severe repercussions for its security and economic development. Terrorism, as well as phenomena such as the radicalization of individuals and the resurgence of criminal networks, have had a significant impact on the region's stability and the welfare of its inhabitants. The stalemate in the Middle East peace process poses another serious challenge, which needs to be addressed on the basis of the two-State solution. The Syrian, Libyan and Yemeni conflicts affect the broader region through possible spillover, with unimaginable humanitarian consequences for the population: unprecedented refugee and migration flows, human smuggling and trafficking, illicit arms trafficking, and asymmetric threats undermining security in the Middle East and North Africa and the broader Mediterranean region.

In this regard, we would like to make a special reference to the Syrian crisis and its tangible impact on our country, owing to Greece's geographic location, following unprecedented refugee flows. The challenges posed by this situation are just one of the imperative reasons for which the crisis needs to come to an end. In our view, there is no alternative to a political solution reached through an inclusive dialogue, in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and the 2012 Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex). This will allow for the refugee issue to be addressed in a comprehensive and efficient manner, paving the way for refugees to return to an ordinary life. Any action that could undermine this possibility or aggravate the humanitarian situation within the country should be avoided.

It is our firm belief that in order to restore stability and peace the region, it is essential to abide by certain principles. First of all, there must be a political solution to end this crisis. In this respect, the United Nations has a fundamental role to play, which needs to be strongly supported by the international community and the parties to the conflict. At the same time, respect for international law, relevant treaties and United Nations resolutions remains the cornerstone of our efforts to maintain peace and security. In this context, it is important to refrain from actions that undermine the principle of territorial integrity and sovereignty. Accountability is another crucial element that needs to be safeguarded in order to put an end to impunity. Last but not least, it is essential to promote a positive, broader and manifold agenda of cooperation focusing on developing synergies and joint activities, especially through constructive topics, such as the economy, trade, energy, education and research, taking into account the emergence of viable gas hubs, as well as the promotion of religious coexistence and pluralism and the untapped potential of culture as one of the main drivers of soft power.

In the light of all this and in an effort to promote security in its neighbourhood and the broader region of the eastern Mediterranean, but also to contribute to enhancing a positive agenda of cooperation among actors that have a special interest in the Middle East, Greece has launched targeted initiatives, including the Rhodes Conference for Security and Stability and the Athens Conference on Religious and Cultural Pluralism and Peaceful Coexistence in the Middle East. Furthermore, along with Cyprus, we have established trilateral teams of cooperation, which have acquired an institutionalized character, with Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Cyprus.

Mr. Korneliou (Cyprus): At the outset, I wish to commend the Russian presidency for organizing this timely debate, and to thank you, Mr. President, for giving us the opportunity to participate.

Cyprus aligns itself with the statement of the European Union. I wish to make the following remarks in my national capacity.

As you, Mr. President, rightly mention in the concept note (S/2018/524, annex), the Middle East is among the regions in the world most afflicted with old

and new persisting crises. Unfortunately, too often we have seen the law of the jungle prevail over the principles of international law. The international community must collectively uphold its responsibility to reverse this course by adhering to the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. These principles serve as a benchmark for what we accomplish in our efforts to uphold international law. They are the barometer of what we generally perceive as just and viable.

Allow me to refer briefly to my own country, Cyprus, which is a test case in that region. We have stated time and again that, if the rules of international law had not been violated, the Cyprus problem would not have arisen, and if these rules were applied today, the problem would be solved in the interest of all parties concerned. There is no other option but to continue our efforts to reach a negotiated solution under United Nations auspices. In this context, we welcome the Secretary-General's intention to send a senior official to conduct in-depth consu'tations with a view to a meaningful resumption of the political process. Let me also echo the Secretary-General's call on the Security Council to increase its support and encouragement.

We should not forget that the Security Council has the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security under the Charter of the United Nations. It should therefore be clear that anachronistic mechanisms of guarantees and the presence of foreign troops in a post-settlement Cyprus are inconsistent with our efforts to reunite our country and become a normal State, as the Secretary-General eloquently put it.

Cyprus straddles Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, and has close historical and cultural ties with the countries of the region. Cyprus, along with Greece, as mentioned by the Permanent Representative of Greece, have established trilateral partnerships with our neighbouring countries: Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine. This cooperation is founded upon our adherence to international law and a rules-based international order as the bedrocks for peace and prosperity for all countries and peoples in the region. We look forward to embracing our neighbours who support these principles.

In the same context, we have concluded agreements on the delimitation of our maritime zones with Egypt, Israel and Lebanon. This has allowed us to develop a programme of hydrocarbon exploration in our exclusive economic zone. Once again, the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and of international law show the way forward and not unilateral actions that endanger international peace and security.

We have followed closely the developments in the Middle East and North Africa region — a region that has been shaken by unprecedented unrest, turmoil and conflict. The tide of upheaval has now begun to recede, but serious challenges remain, notably in Yemen and Syria. The coming months will be defined by post-war transitions, peace talks, ballot boxes and reconstruction. In any case, a military solution is not an option and adherence to international humanitarian law and respect for the need to protect civilians are indispensable.

The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) has been defeated, but it remains a threat. We have to strengthen our efforts aimed at stability and reconciliation and not allow ISIL or other radical groups to exploit political instability once again. A solution to the Israeli-Palestinian question will have an undeniably positive ripple effect on other regional crises and in the battle to combat the threat of violent extremism and terrorism. We maintain our principled position and support for a just and comprehensive settlement based on a two-State solution under international law and pursuant to the relevant Security Council resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Regarding Syria, we fully support the efforts of Staffan de Mistura, which are aimed at driving the political process forward. We remain committed to a unified, sovereign and independent Syria without any foreign occupying forces. At the same time, it is of the utmost importance to address the serious challenges faced by Syrian refugees and the neighbouring countries hosting them. We also deplore all efforts to eliminate ethnic, Christian and other religious minorities in the Middle East. Cyprus, with a long-standing history of peaceful coexistence of various religious groups, stands ready to contribute to the promotion of inter-faith dialogue.

Lastly, we condemn the deliberate destruction of cultural heritage in Syria and Iraq and across the region. The cultural heritage originating from the cradle of our civilization should be protected. Cyprus is therefore at the forefront of efforts to that end.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to express my country's gratitude to the Russian Federation for its outstanding presidency of the Security Council this month. My country's delegation commends the convening of this important meeting presided over by the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. We also congratulate your friendly country, Mr. President, on hosting and organizing the FIFA World Cup with distinction.

My country's delegation has considered the concept note (S/2018/524, annex) for this meeting, and we highly appreciate the principled policy adopted by the friendly Russian Federation and other significant States Members of this international Organization, based on seeking basic solutions to crises and conflicts according to international law and the Charter of the United Nations. Such crises, which have ravaged the globe for decades, are the result of the Government policies of certain countries with major military, economic and financial power that believe that they can use the work of the international Organization to serve their own interests and determine the destinies of the peoples of the world. Those countries — some of which are permanent members of the Security Council — monopolize and steal the riches of others, fabricate crises and wars and control them indirectly and directly to serve their own interests and agendas, which represent a fundamental threat to international peace and security.

Consequently, those Powers are currently defying the collective will of the international community, while rejecting the multilateral system, and stop at nothing to serve their own interests, including by distorting the Charter of the United Nations and manipulating the provisions of international law to justify their policies. Those Powers carry out direct acts of military aggression and occupy other countries' territories by force, characterizing their acts of aggression and occupation as wars against terrorism. Those Powers support the continued Israeli occupation of Arab lands, claiming that it is based on a historical right even though that is a falsification of history. They support terrorism by claiming that it is a moderate bloody revolution and a rainbow spring.

At the same time, those Powers deny the right of peoples to resist occupation and aggression, and say that those people's right to defend themselves is a form of terrorism. They align themselves with the most powerful Wahhabi dictatorships, which are the underlying cause of international terrorism in the world together with the Israeli Zionism. Such alliances are characterized by strategic partnerships. In addition, those Powers impose economic, commercial and financial sanctions against many peoples throughout the world, which is a flagrant violation of the provisions of the Charter, while using the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as a pretext to claim that no one must be left behind. In that regard, we must not forget that one of those Powers withdrew from UNESCO, the Human Rights Council and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. Who knows — perhaps Power may also withdraw tomorrow from this international Organization.

My country, Syria, believes that any serious and balanced approach to the underlying causes of the crises in the Middle East — the cradle of civilization, as all colleagues have said before me — must be based first and foremost on acknowledging that the main cause continues to be the Israeli occupation of Arab lands, including the Syrian Golan, rather than the propaganda disseminated by some claiming that the cause of the crises is the result of ethnic and religious conflicts. The international community has not been able to end the Israeli occupation of occupied Arab lands or ensure the establishment of a Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital. Any attempt to fabricate regional and national crises to save Israel and deprive Arab countries, including Palestine, of their rights, and any proposed deal characterized by theft violates the relevant international resolutions and will only lead to more crises, the pursuit of conflicts and the escalation of threats to international and regional peace and security.

For the past eight years, Syria has suffered from one of the most bitter crises that the world has known in decades. It is a violent terrorist war that certain Governments have supported, financed and fuelled. They have earmarked millions of dollars to militarize the Syrian crisis. Those Governments have established and funded armed terrorist groups that have adopted extremist religious slogans that are totally foreign to Syrian society. Those same Governments have focused their efforts on recruiting young people throughout the world, brainwashing them into becoming foreign terrorist fighters, and sending them to Syria and Iraq. Governments and intelligence agencies in Arab countries and the region have facilitated travel for thousands of those extremists through their territories,

in particular Turkey. Meanwhile, other States have turned a blind eye to terrorists travelling to Syria.

Those thousands of terrorist fighters therefore now represent an international crisis whereby their countries of origin fear their return. Nevertheless, the United States continues to train terrorists and armed fighters in 19 areas it occupies in the heart of Syria, including the Al-Tanf area and the Rukban camp on the border shared by Syria, Jordan and Iraq. The United States is providing them with rations, weapons, ammunition, fuel and support from 22 American bases outside of Syria. It provides the terrorist Da'esh organization with the facilities necessaryto carry out its attacks against the Syrian Arab Army.

Even worse, those Governments have politicized the issue of providing humanitarian assistance in Syria. They attempt to control the work of the United Nations by falsifying information, fabricating evidence and manipulating the reports on the use of chemical weapons in Syria, which are based exclusively on false information from the White Helmets, one of the deceptive branches of the terrorist Al-Nusra Front. The group was established by British intelligence and recently received $6.7 million from the United States to enable it to distort facts about the Syrian Government, blackmail it along with its allies and end their war on terrorism for the entire world.

I am affirming once again that the Syrian Government has not used toxic chemical weapons. It has no chemical weapons. They were destroyed on an American ship in the Mediterranean Sea. The Council knows that, and so does the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. I also want to stress that it was armed terrorist groups that used those chemical weapons, producing them with cutting-edge technology provided by some western States, and we will provide the United Nations specialized agencies with proof of that in the near future, evidence that we will present in addition to the 147 letters that we have submitted to the members of the United Nations on the use of chemical weapons by terrorist groups in Syria.

Unfortunately, the opportunity that the Russian Federation has provided in holding today's meeting to address these crises conscientiously and hear new ideas aimed at helping the peoples concerned deal with their problems has not been seized by certain States that have failed to uphold their ethical and political principles. We have heard the statements from Britain, France and the United States, repeating the inappropriate political language that we have been hearing for decades in the halls of this Organization and whose purpose is to try to blind people to their aggressive policies, which have destroyed dozens of Member States and resulted in the looting of their riches. Needless to say, those same States are the main cause of the problems in the region thanks to their old colonialist policies and their support for the extremist, aggressive policies of Israel. They interfere in the internal affairs of countries in the region and give direct or indirect support to foreign terrorist groups, which they refuse to put on the Security Council sanctions list. They are attempting to overthrow certain Governments in the region with the fallacious arguments that we have heard in their political statements.

The Syrians who believe in their country and their independence have fought terrorism and defeated it in large areas of the country. They will continue their efforts to achieve that goal in order to put an end to terrorism and liberate the whole of Syria from occupation.

Finally, I would like to address my colleague the representative of Turkey's reference to his country fighting terrorism in northern Syria and liberating 4,000 square kilometres. I want to remind him that the basic principles of international law oblige his Government to coordinate and cooperate with Syria.

First, if his Government had good intentions, it should have first cooperated with the Syrian Government to fight terrorism. Under international law, a State is prohibited from any incursion into the territory of another State, especially a neighbour with which it has historical ties. It is prohibited from any incursion into the territory of another State without that State's request, and that request was never made. Secondly, Turkey's military forces entered our territory without a request or authorization from the Syrian Government. Thirdly, the Government of Turkey is the main source of the terrorism that spread to many parts of my country, particularly northern Syria, because it facilitated the training and financing of terrorists and extremists and allowed them to enter Syria from all over the world, something that Turkey's Government and intelligence services knew about. Fourthly, Turkey is part of the crisis that represents a threat to regional peace and security due to its policies, much like those of Israel. Fifthly, Syria has a right to liberate the entirety of its occupied territories, whether they are occupied

by Israel or Turkey. We have the right to fight terrorism and those who support it on any part of our land.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Khoshroo (Islamic Republic of Iran): For the sake of brevity, I will read a shortened version of my statement. I would like to thank the Russian presidency for organizing today's debate and inviting my delegation to participate in it. I would also like to warmly welcome Mr. Sergey Vershinin, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, and to applaud his important role in the Astana process, one of the most effective processes in the establishment of peace and security in the Syrian Arab Republic, with the participation of the Russian Federation, Turkey and my own country.

A comprehensive review of the situation in the Middle East and North Africa requires, above all, consideration of its root causes. That analysis should also consider the actions of the Security Council in maintaining peace and security in the region. In-depth analysis of all the causes of conflict and war in the region over the past few decades shows that in most cases, a common denominator emerges — foreign intervention, foreign interference, foreign occupation or a combination of the three. Even in the rare cases where a conflict has internal causes, it is manipulated, escalated and prolonged by the illicit interference of Powers in the region or various countries outside it.

The Israeli occupation of Palestine is at the centre of all the conflicts in the Middle East. That injustice has continued for more than 70 years and has been intensified by Israel's aggressive expansionist and apartheid policies towards the Palestinians and the region generally. The Israeli regime and its incremental, aggressive and expansionist policies, along with its behaviour towards its neighbours, continues to be the main threat to regional peace and security. While the Palestinian territories and the Syrian Golan Heights have remained under illegal occupation by Israel, the regime has launched more than 100 strikes in Syria and Lebanon. Israel's recent mass killings of unarmed civilians in Gaza are the most recent expression of an old pattern that the Israeli regime has followed for the past 70 years.

The illegal announcement regarding Al-Quds Al-Sharif and the transfer of the United States Embassy to that city is another example of a policy that serves only to exacerbate the problems in the Middle East and North Africa and throughout the Islamic world. The impunity that the regime there has enjoyed for so long would not have been possible without the support of the United States.

There are other major contributing factors. All of these foreign interventions and occupations, and all the efforts to manipulate the people of the Middle East and North Africa, have resulted in a climate of instability that is a breeding ground for terrorists and extremists. Groups that initially received support from certain States and parties within and outside the region to fight for them eventually turned into monsters, threatening their supporters and creators. As a result, terrorism and extremism are much stronger and more widespread in the Middle East and North Africa region today following the many invasions by the United States and its allies.

Other crises in the region, such as those in Libya, Iraq, Syria and Yemen, are all examples of crises being stoked through invasion, illegal foreign intervention, terror, extremism and violence. Such problems have persisted and deepened due to the failure of the international community to carry out its responsibilities by addressing the root causes and the erroneous actions of outsiders.

The situation in Yemen represents a very serious threat to regional and international security and is another breeding ground for terrorist groups. The war of aggression of the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen and the numerous war crimes committed by it directly threaten peace and security. Acts such as deliberate attacks on residential areas and civilian targets, imposing a humanitarian blockade, using famine as a war tactic and denying access to international relief agencies are all war crimes and are punishable under international humanitarian law. The international community and the Security Council should hold the Saudi regime accountable for those criminal acts. It should intervene effectively to end the senseless military operation, including the ongoing attack against Al-Hudaydah — the lifeline of basic humanitarian aid to millions of needy people in Yemen — establish a ceasefire, ensure the delivery of humanitarian and medical assistance and restore peace and stability in the country through an intra-Yemeni dialogue on national reconciliation without preconditions.

Since the beginning of the ongoing tragedy in the Syrian Arab Republic, Iran has always called for a peaceful solution to the conflict based on respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria, as well as the right of the Syrian people to determine their own political future. Time and again, Iran has reiterated that there can be no military solution to the situation in Syria. As such, we have always adhered to a genuine Syrian-led and Syrian-owned process in order to achieve peace and national reconciliation. While the United States and its regional allies continue to pursue their narrow and short-sighted goals in the region, Iran and Russia have made great sacrifices to combat the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and other terrorist groups throughout the region.

As our participation in the Astana and International Syria Support Group meetings shows, we support any initiative that can help to achieve an end to that conflict. The Astana format, of which Russia, Turkey and Iran are guarantors, has developed into an effective instrument for a joint platform to fight terrorism and to contribute to peace and stability in Syria. The hostile statements of certain States that we hear these days, including today, are actively perpetuated by those that desperately need to create an imaginary enemy in order to sell their arms and embark on an arms race in the region. They have nothing to do with peace and security in the Middle East.

The Islamic Republic of Iran views the establishment of a regional dialogue forum in the Persian Gulf as the best way to resolve regional crises and to create a stronger region. The objective of a strong region, as opposed to the quest for hegemony and the exclusion of other actors, is rooted in recognizing the need to respect the interests of all stakeholders. Any dominant effort by one country is not only inappropriate but also essentially impossible. Indeed, those that insist on following such a path create instability.

As inheritors of the richest civilizations, the countries in the Middle East and North Africa region should stand tall. We can solve our own problems among ourselves and secure a better future for all our children without outside interference and patronage, both of which come at a heavy price to our collective dignity, as well as our future development.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mrs. Furman (Israel): This debate comes at a crucial time for the Middle East, as conflicts from Syria and Yemen to Gaza and Lebanon continue to escalate. The current trend is growing instability and cruelty. When we consider the challenges of the Middle East, we cannot ignore the one common denominator — Iran, which plays a central role in destabilizing the region. Its threat rests on three unholy pillars: nuclear military ambitions, the promotion of regional instability through proxy terrorist groups, and its ballistic missile programme. Those dangers begin in our region, but they do not end there. They are global and place all of us at risk.

The Iranian nuclear and nuclear-related activities — the first pillar — remain the most dangerous threat to international peace and security. We cannot turn a blind eye to the combination of Iran's quest for nuclear capabilities and its well-known intentions. As Israel's Prime Minister revealed on 30 April, Iran has sought to acquire a nuclear weapon for decades and has continued its covert project to pursue a nuclear-weapon capability. Even after signing the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2015, Iran's ambitions did not change. Iran preserved its enrichment capabilities for future military use and never stopped developing the means of delivery.

The JCPOA failed to indefinitely block all paths to an Iranian nuclear weapon. In practice, by easing sanctions, the JCPOA allowed for a malicious regime to take advantage of the goodwill of the international community and to exploit it for aggression in the region and at home. Iran's behaviour has not improved. In fact, it has continued to deteriorate. It is incumbent upon us to act together to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon, including through economic pressure and sanctions.

Iran is a violent and extremist regime with violent and extremist intentions. No civilian, no community and no country in the Middle East can be spared from Iran's hegemonic ambitions to devour its neighbours, its neighbourhood and beyond. Iran's regional ambition is the second pillar. It comprises two main dimensions. First is its radical ideology, reflected in the countless statements of Iran's Supreme Leader Khamenei and other senior regime officials with regard to Iran's ultimate plan to export the revolution across the world. Second is its strategy of direct and proxy terrorism and spreading subversion from within. By operating terrorist organizations from afar, as well as tens of

thousands of militia fighters under the command of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, Iran tries to avoid the spotlight of liability and seeks to increase its economic and political influence and to consolidate its grip over the countries upon which it preys.

If one looks at a map of the Middle East, Iran's plan is clear. It has strategically deployed proxies throughout the region with the aim of forming a land bridge that links Tehran to the Mediterranean Sea through Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. Iran has increased its control over the strategic Bab al-Mandab strait, which is invaluable to commercial trade between Asia and Europe, and over the Strait of Hormuz, through which 20 per cent of the world's oil supply passes. No one that values economic growth, prosperity and freedom of navigation would be willing to trade the invisible hand of Adam Smith for the fingers of Ayatollah Khamenei. We witnessed that danger when the Houthis, Iran's proxy in Yemen, attacked ships in the Red Sea.

Iran trains, funds, directs and supplies State-grade weaponry to non-State terrorist actors. It proliferates its knowledge to those terrorist groups, allowing them to establish independent capabilities. Take Syria, for example. Iran has solidified a long-term military presence across the country, maintaining at least 1,500 Quds Force fighters that command the Shiite militias. The Iranian Revolutionary Guard also directs tens of thousands of foreign fighters stationed in Syria and tens of thousands of Syrian militias. Iran is taking control of Syrian natural resources and infrastructure and is building military bases across the country to solidify its long-term presence in Syria.

In Yemen, Iran has accelerated its efforts to smuggle sophisticated weapons and technological know-how to the Houthis. According to the most recent report by the United Nations panel of experts, Iran is not in compliance with resolution 2216 (2015). In addition, the latest United Nations report (S/2018/602) on the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015) has also reached the same conclusion, which is that the Houthis are using Iranian missiles. And in Iraq the situation is no different. Iran funds, arms and trains its associated militias stationed there.

There is no better example of Middle Eastern conflicts beginning and ending with Iran than Hizbullah in Lebanon. Aside from accumulating tens of thousands of rockets and missiles, largely in the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon and among civilians, as well as increasing Hizbullah's grip on the Lebanese political system, Iran's latest ploy is to turn Lebanon into a factory of precision-guided missiles. Israel will not allow Hizbullah to acquire those capabilities. Iran has also made its presence known in southern Israel. Yahya Sinwar, the head of Hamas in Gaza, confirmed again on 18 May that Iran provided the Al-Qassam Brigades and other terrorist groups in Gaza with money, military equipment and expertise.

Iran spends approximately $7 billion each year funding its proxies and terrorist organizations, all at the expense of its own citizens. Allow me to break that down for the Council. In Iran, a doctor working in a Government hospital with five or six years of experience is paid $600 per month, but an Iranian proxy terrorist earns $800 per month and a Hizbullah terrorist can make as much as $1,800 per month. A nation's spending offers clear insights into its priorities. Iran's financial priorities are death and destruction rather than the well-being of its own people. Only the twisted minds of the ayatollahs can invest in heavy-water reactors instead of fresh, clean water for the Iranian people.

The third pillar of Iran's regional and global threat is its vast missile programme, including short-, medium- and long-range missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads. Iran's ballistic capabilities and their proliferation throughout the region are well-documented in numerous United Nations reports. Since the initial implementation of resolution 2231 (2015), Iran has conducted dozens of ballistic-missile tests. It is ironic that Iran claims the need for self-defence when it is the rest of the world that is threatened by Iran's ballistic missiles. For example, as the Deputy Commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, Hossein Salami, has said,

> "Today over 100,000 rockets are ready to be launched towards Israel and additional tens of thousands of long-range missiles are ready in various places around the Muslim world to wipe Israel once and for all off the geopolitical map."

The international community must prevent Iran from acquiring, developing, testing and stockpiling ballistic capabilities and spreading them around the world.

The world is facing a regime that cannot be trusted. Iran remains the foremost State sponsor of terrorism in the world. The Iranian regime is oppressive — preforming hundreds of executions every year, jailing journalists, suppressing ethnic minorities, destroying the prayer

sanctuaries of religious minorities and discriminating on the basis of ethnicity, sexuality and gender. At times, it seems that the ayatollahs have taken it upon themselves to create the ultimate combination of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky's worst nightmare. Iran's Government is indeed an association of men who do violence to the rest of us, and they should be judged by the people they jail and hang, among others.

When it comes to Israel, Iran's end goal is undeniable. The Supreme Leader of Iran himself set a timetable of 25 years for the destruction of Israel. Not only does Iran call for Israel's annihilation, it is taking decisive action towards that end. Iran funds, supports and arms Hizbullah and Hamas. It has carried out terror attacks against Israeli targets worldwide. In the past few months alone, Iran sent an unmanned aerial vehicle armed with explosives and launched a barrage of missiles from Syria into Israeli territory. Iran's actions place our citizens directly in harm's way. We must not tolerate its continued hostility and aggression any longer. It is not too late to stop Iran from pursuing its malicious policies throughout the region. Israel will always know how to protect itself, but the international community has an obligation to stand up and face this radical and dangerous regime. Doing so now will pave the way for a better future for our region and for the world.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the observer of the League of Arab States.

Mr. Abdelaziz (League of Arab States) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to begin, Mr. President, by expressing the gratitude of the League of Arab States for inviting us to today's high-level debate and congratulating the delegation of the Russian Federation on its preparation of today's distinctive concept note (S/2018/524, annex). We would also like to welcome the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Russia, who has been presiding over this important meeting.

As most speakers have said today, the Middle East is the cradle of civilization. But since the founding of the United Nations, it has witnessed several devastating wars in which international foreign Powers have participated. The wars in 1948, 1956, 1967 and 1973 opened the way for Arab countries to seriously seek a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. That endeavour began with the initiative of the late President Anwar Sadat, who visited Israel, the signing in 1978 of two Camp David framework agreements for peace between Israel and Egypt and Israel and Palestine, the two peace treaties between Egypt and Israel and Jordan and Israel, followed by the Oslo negotiations, the Madrid Peace Conference and the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative. All of those endorsed a two-State solution as the basis for a fair and comprehensive settlement of the conflict. A road map was adopted with the five final status issues, which continue to be the elements for a genuine peace process. In parallel, the Quartet was established to directly oversee the implementation process. The United Nations took part in order to ensure that all of its organs, particularly the Security Council, participated in the peaceful settlement of the dispute. That is the backdrop to the current situation.

A fair examination by the United Nations of the causes for the start and continuation of the wars in the Middle East and for the Organization's failure to establish international peace and security in our region might highlight certain fundamental elements that can be summarized as follows. First, there is a lack of a clear political end to the peace process in the Middle East that would take into account the plan submitted by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to the Security Council on 20 February (see S/PV.8183), as well as various Arab League summit- and ministerial-level resolutions, particularly in the light of the United States Administration's decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, defying the international legitimacy, all previous agreements and conventions and contradicting all the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions. The media is also reporting that the United States will no longer pursue negotiations on the five final status issues as a basis for peace. Such negotiations will be replaced by an attempt to launch major economic projects in the West Bank and Gaza financed and supported by Arab countries and others. There is no doubt that the situation will not be helped by excluding Jerusalem from the final status negotiations, seeking a unilateral decision, averting the issue of refugees by failing to fund the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, or failing to fund the activities of the Palestinian Authority. There are also the attempts to stand in the way of Palestinians protecting themselves from Israeli military aggression. Some 13,000 have been injured and more than 130 have been martyrs, all of which shows that there need to be an exhaustive attempt to bring the peace process back on track to where it should be.

Secondly, the absence of a political horizon also relates to the ambiguity posed by an arms build-up in the region, namely, nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, and the absence of any efforts on the part of the three countries signatories of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) or of the Secretary-General to implement the fourth plan of action adopted by the NPT Review Conference in 2010 by holding an international conference for the establishment of a zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East, which did not take place. The deplorable result is that Israel continues to maintain its nuclear capacity, about which we do not know anything and which is not subject to the safeguards guarantees of the International Atomic Energy Agency. Furthermore, we see chemical weapons being used in Syria, and the United Nations is not even able to investigate and determine who is responsible. All of that indicates that the Middle East region could move into a new phase of an arms race for conventional, and perhaps nuclear, weapons in order to try to strike a certain strategic balance when it comes to armaments, particularly with the growing international concern about Iran's nuclear capability.

Thirdly, some international and regional Powers wrongly interpret Arab trends towards change and development, particularly in countries that have experienced popular revolutions or societal movements since 2011 or in countries that have seen changes in their attempts to develop and modernize themselves. We see this very clearly in the increase in the number of flagrant violations and acts of interference in the internal affairs of Arab countries that support certain religious and ethnic movements, in order to defend restricted interests that have nothing to do with the aspirations of the Arab peoples for change. There are many clear examples of that. There are those that support the Kurds and incite them to declare their independence. Some support Hizbullah, Hamas or Islamic Jihad in order to impose their power and to stir up tensions between Israel and Palestine, rather than resolving the crisis. Others support the Muslim Brotherhood in order to revitalize the failed visions of previous empires. Some support the Shiites to destabilize the Sunni countries and give support to extremist terrorist groups such as Da'esh, the Al-Nusra Front and others in Arab countries, in order to show that Governments are weak and rejected by the people.

Fourthly, the Security Council and the international community wrongly interpret differences among Arabs, which contradicts its position in other parts of the world where there are different political groupings and where we see that the Council and the international community support the settlement of disputes. They put the common interests over and above individual interests without foreign intervention. What exacerbates the situation is the plethora of foreign mediators who have opinions differing from those of the Arab peoples and from those of the Arab States themselves. That clearly shows that we need positive efforts in order to resolve the differences between Arab countries and to strengthen common Arab action, particularly since the Arab countries have all the necessary human and material resources to do so.

Fifthly, the Middle East region, in particular the conflict areas, has become a battleground between the major Powers. We have seen the use of the veto by the major Powers in the Security Council, particularly when it comes to issues relating to Palestine and Syria and other urgent Arab issues. That is clear proof that the major Powers use the destiny of our peoples and countries to strengthen their areas of influence and power in order to forge regional alliances, while ignoring the great human and material suffering that this imposes on the peoples of the Arab world. We see that Arab conflicts have become proxy wars for the major Powers, which limit our capacity as Arabs to do away with the conflicts once and for all and to develop ourselves. That is not really what these major Powers should be doing in terms of their responsibilities at the international level, especially when they are permanent members of the Security Council.

We do not have enough time to delve into an in-depth analysis of the root causes of the conflicts in Middle East. It is a complicated issue where everything is interconnected that would require many meetings. But I would like to conclude with a final point. With regard to your proposal, Mr. President, to launch a regional dialogue similar to the Helsinki process that was launched in Europe in the 1970s, with the participation of foreign partners, such a process should be based on the Arab Peace Initiative and on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on the Iranian nuclear programme, in order to foster trust among Arab countries and Israel and Iran. Such a proposal is not being made for the first time. The main thing that we need to ask ourselves here is what sort of trust we are

talking about. Israel continues to occupy territories in Syria, Palestine and Lebanon and obstructs the establishment of a Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital, and is supported in its positions by foreign Powers. How can we speak about trust when Israel and Iran continue to develop their undisclosed nuclear capacities and when Iran flagrantly interferes in the internal affairs of Arab countries by providing support to organizations that are opposed to the Arab Governments on ideological and religious bases?

The League of Arab States believes that a regional dialogue based on a format similar to Helsinki could be a positive development, but only if it were based on practical processes that could bring about a just and comprehensive peace, and provided that the territorial sovereignty of Arab countries were respected, that all parties undertook not to interfere in internal Arab affairs and committed to respecting States' regional unity and respecting international legitimacy, international law, international humanitarian law and human rights law. They should commit themselves to the Charter of the United Nations and to Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, in particular when it comes to the creation of an independent Palestinian State within 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and to making the Middle East a zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction. They should also stop trying to impose hegemony on the Arab region or any part of it. In that regard, the League of Arab States would like the Secretary-General to play a more effective and pivotal role in the political sphere, through his good offices, in re-establishing peace and stability in the region and ridding the Middle East of weapons of mass destruction. We are sure that the Arab world is able to overcome its current crisis and move towards achieving peace, development and progress.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Jordan.

Ms. Bahous (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like to welcome the presence here of the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Sergey Vershinin, and to thank the Russian Federation for having organized this important meeting and invited us to participate. We also thank the Secretary-General, Mr. Guterres, for his statement this morning.

At the outset, it must be noted that although there is international consensus about the importance of the Middle East and North Africa in achieving and sustaining international peace and security, there is still an urgent need for greater regional and international cooperation in order to resolve the crises in this region and put an end to the suffering of the peoples involved.

Jordan believes that the region needs a genuine political commitment to peace. It is up to the international community to maintain stability and security in the region, and the international community has a joint responsibility to help the peoples of the region to overcome the challenges that they face, in keeping with the resolutions of international legitimacy, human rights law and international humanitarian law. We cannot achieve peace and security as long as the root causes of the conflicts exist.

Peace and stability in the Middle East require a just and comprehensive solution to the Israeli-Palestinian crisis on the basis of the relevant international resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative. We need to hold serious negotiations with a set timetable in order to address all final-status issues and bring about the two-State solution. This is the only solution that will create an independent, viable State of Palestine within the borders of 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital, which can live in peace and security alongside Israel.

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan would warn against Israeli attempts to change the identity and character of Jerusalem and to make changes to the historical and legal status of the Al-Aqsa Holy Mosque, because this would affect millions of Muslims throughout the world. The Kingdom will continue to defend Jerusalem and its holy sites, Muslim and Christian, in accordance with the historical Hashemite custodianship thereof, which is incumbent on King Abdullah II of Jordan. We underscore here that Jerusalem is one of the final-status issues that must be addressed through negotiations. As for East Jerusalem, it is an integral part of territories occupied in 1967.

There must be an effective international response to the needs of countries that are suffering from conflict, and help must be offered to the countries of the region that are hosting refugees. Jordan has been dealing with various waves of refugees, the latest of which is that of Syrian refugees, which puts a strain on various parts of our society, as Jordan hosts more than 1.3 million Syrian refugees. We ask the international community to take responsibility and help Jordan to deal with them, because we cannot take the strain alone. We must

also make every effort to strengthen the humanitarian and ethical role of the international community to assist the Palestinian refugees and provide financial support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) through long-term funding. This would send an important political message to the effect that the international community has not forgotten Palestinian refugees and will not deprive 1.5 million Palestinian students of their right to education in the five areas of operation of UNRWA. That work needs to continue until such time as the Palestinian question has been resolved in a just manner.

My country reiterates that international efforts to politically resolve the Syrian crisis must continue by guaranteeing the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria in the context of a solution that is accepted by the Syrians in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015). Jordan has attempted to reduce the level of violence and to bring about stability in Syria. This can be seen in the de-escalation agreements in the south of Syria, and this is a very important step in stopping violence and creating the conditions necessary for a lasting political solution in Syria and for the return of refugees. We are very concerned at what is taking place in southern Syria, and we reiterate the importance of respecting the de-escalation agreements. We call on the international community to put an end to the military escalation in southern Syria.

We also reiterate that the Hashemite Kingdom will continue to assist our Syrian brothers and sisters and help to meet the needs of Syrian refugees. Jordan will play its part in helping refugees, and so must the international community. Jordan is bearing full responsibility for those refugees. The international community has to bear its responsibility too, and the United Nations must address any new displacement in southern Syria. Jordan will assist to the extent possible all efforts to support our Syrian brothers and sisters within and outside of Syria.

Jordan reiterates that the only solution to the Yemeni situation is a political one that is agreed upon by all the Yemeni people in order to ensure the country's unity and territorial integrity. Jordan also underscores the importance of implementing resolution 2216 (2015), which represents a comprehensive and balanced road map for resolving the crisis. We underline the importance of continuing work on the political track on the basis of the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Arab Gulf Initiative and the outcome of the National Dialogue Conference.

We also stress the need to fight terrorism in all its forms. Jordan will continue to cooperate with the international community in fighting terrorism and eradicating its threat. We must also focus on achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals that are based on the national interests of the countries of the region, so as to include all sectors of society and ensure the empowerment of women and youth in order for them to participate at all levels. We must also strengthen the interconnection between security, peace, human rights and development.

In conclusion, I would like to underscore the important central role played by the United Nations in supporting the countries of the region in order to bring about security, peace and stability.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Qatar.

Ms. Al-Thani (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): Mr. President, I wish to congratulate you on having assumed the presidency of the Council. We appreciate your initiative to hold this debate and to enable us to participate. We agree with you on the importance of holding this debate in an objective manner, free of political considerations, and of thinking outside the box in order to prevent and resolve crises and promote international peace and security.

For decades our region has been marred by crises and conflicts, with serious ramifications not only for its security and stability but also in terms of the unimaginable humanitarian consequences suffered by its peoples. This poses a continuous threat to international peace and security, and therefore the Security Council has devoted efforts to addressing these challenges. A holistic vision is required in order to address these conflicts and crises, their causes and the elements that could lead to their resolution.

We reiterated many times that addressing these crises, both new and old, requires that we tackle their root causes, meet the economic and development needs of the peoples of the region, promote the rule of law and good governance and respect human rights, as well as kindle hope for the peoples of the region for a better future, especially young people, so as to shield them against extremism and violence.

Turning to the mandate of the Security Council, it is extremely important to promote international and regional collective-security mechanisms to resolve conflicts in a peaceful way, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations.

The maintenance of international peace and security requires respect for international law and a commitment to the Charter, respect for human rights and a commitment to refraining from the use of any policies that would exacerbate instability and undermine international peace and security. In this respect, the contrived crisis imposed on Qatar as well as the unjust blockade and unilateral, illegal and unjust measures against it represent the epitome of irresponsible policies that contravene international law and the provisions of the Charter, run counter to good-neighbourliness and undermine relations among countries and fraternal peoples, and do not safeguard important regional organizations such as the Gulf Cooperation Council.

This crisis, which is alien to the values of our peoples and undermines their historical cohesion, represents a threat to the security and stability of this vital region which is so important to the world and has costly ramifications for international peace and security. This contrived crisis has highlighted new challenges to international peace and security, such as the hacking crime against the State of Qatar and the consequent lies upon which the contrived crisis was built. It has demonstrated the seriousness of the cyberspace threat to the security and sovereignty of States. We must call attention to the threats that States and societies are subjected to in this area, and how to safeguard the cybersecurity. We welcome the fact that the Secretary-General is focusing attention on this.

Through its foreign policy, the State of Qatar seeks to maintain international peace and security and resolve conflicts and disputes by peaceful means and dialogue, while maintaining constructive collective work and good neighbourliness. We therefore continue to call for dialogue to resolve the Gulf crisis, and we appreciate the efforts of friendly and fraternal countries, led by His Highness the Amir of Kuwait, to resolve it.

The settlement of crises in the region must be based on respect for international law, the Charter of the United Nations, resolutions of international legitimacy, friendly relations among the States, good neighbourliness and abstaining from the threat or use of force, in addition to addressing the root causes.

Collective efforts must be made to combat terrorism and extremism, while taking measures to eliminate terrorist groups, uproot them and ensure that they do not re-emerge in different forms. That calls for not only military and security action, but also for a holistic developmental approach that addresses the ideology and narratives of those groups and their means of recruiting young people. That is the approach that the State of Qatar is pursuing in our international initiatives for education and youth employment.

The State of Qatar has launched initiatives to support the efforts of the United Nations in various areas, including support for the mandate of the Security Council to maintain international peace and security. We are determined to continue our efforts to put an end to conflicts and crises and to resolve them peacefully and to work in accordance with the letter and spirit of the Charter of the United Nations.

We address the looming threats in our region and our people's need for security, stability and prosperity while also respecting the rule of law. At the recent Munich Security summit, His Highness Sheikh Tamim Ben Hamad Al Thani, Amir of the State of Qatar, called for the establishment of a regional regime to contribute to maintaining peace and security. He stated,

> "It is time for broader regional security in the Middle East. It is time for all nations of the region to agree on basic security principles and rules of governance, and at least a minimum level of security to allow for peace and prosperity."

In conclusion, the State of Qatar will do its utmost to contribute to all efforts aimed at maintaining international peace and security. We will also continue our policy of supporting and cooperating with the United Nations and our partners in the international community in order to achieve our shared objectives, as we have always done.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Almanzlawiy (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, allow me to welcome the Russian Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs. I congratulate the Russian Federation on its able presidency of the Security Council this month and I thank you, Mr. President, for holding this meeting to discuss the situation in the Middle East.

The Palestinian people have long suffered from unjust occupation, oppressive and racist policies and illegitimate settlement incursion. We would like to pay tribute to the Palestinian people for their resistance and their fight to defend their territory, children and holy sites.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has always supported the Palestinian cause and the brotherly Palestinian people in every way possible. The most recent example of this was our $50 million contribution to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, which we presented during the twenty-ninth Summit of the League of Arab States — the so called Jerusalem Summit — which was held in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia calls on States to not recognize any alterations made by Israel, the occupying Power, beyond the 4 June 1967 borders. We call on the Security Council to assume its responsibility and ensure that Israel complies with the Council's resolutions and international law aimed at putting an end to Israeli occupation; the full withdrawal from the occupied Arab territories, including the occupied Syrian Golan and the Lebanese territory; and the release of all Palestinian prisoners.

My country reiterates that achieving peace on the basis of the two-State solution, in accordance with the international terms of reference and the Arab Peace Initiative, is a strategic choice for a comprehensive and just solution to the Palestinian question, and to putting an end to the Arab-Israeli conflict and all the tragedies and human suffering that it engenders.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia also welcomes the adoption by the General Assembly of resolution ES-10/20, on the protection of Palestinian civilians, and we deplore the fact that the Security Council has not been able to adopt a similar resolution.

In cooperation with our allies — a coalition countries — my country is carrying out a military operation to restore legitimacy in Yemen, save the Yemeni people from obscurantists who are leading them to their doom and retake certain regions that are now being controlled by terrorist militias that are supported by Iran. We are taking very calculated measures to reduce the number of casualties on both sides, especially among civilians. That military operation was initiated at the request of the legitimate Yemeni Government and in accordance with resolution 2216 (2015), which calls for the withdrawal of Houthi rebels from all Yemeni cities, among other things. That is in line with the coalition's approach to assisting the Yemeni Government. Coalition forces are acting with the utmost restraint to ensure the best protection for civilians, while, regrettably, the Houthis are using women and children as human shields, thereby demonstrating their cruelty and lack of respect for the norms of international law.

Iran continues to support the Houthi rebels in Yemen and to supply them with weapons and missiles, which from time to time target cities in my country. In fact, there have been 155 cruel missile attacks against the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The most recent, carried out on Sunday, 24 June, targeted my country's capital, with missile debris falling on residential neighborhoods. Independent reports by the United Nations confirm that those missiles were manufactured in Iran and that Iran supplied them to Houthi rebels. The most recent of such reports, the fifth report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015), published on 12 June, states that

> "The Secretariat has carefully reviewed all information and material available regarding the allegations of the transfer of ballistic missiles, parts thereof or related technology by the Islamic Republic of Iran to the Houthis in Yemen that may have been used in ballistic missile launches aimed at the territory of Saudi Arabia. On the basis of the information and material analysed, it is the assessment of the Secretariat that the debris of five missiles launched at Yanbu' and Riyadh since July 2017 share key design features with a known type of missile manufactured by the Islamic Republic of Iran. It is also the assessment of the Secretariat that some component parts of the debris were manufactured in the Islamic Republic of Iran." (*S/2018/602, para. 10*)

The report also mentions nine additional launches of ballistic missiles against my country, which were Iranian Qiam-1 ballistic missiles. Those are flagrant violations of resolutions 2216 (2015) and 2231 (2016). The Security Council must take a firm stand against Iran to show that the international community is not powerless in the face of those aggressive terrorist practices that are destabilizing regional and international peace and security.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia condemns the random laying of thousands of mines by the Houthis — in Yemen generally and in Al-Hudaydah specifically — which poses a serious threat tocivilians. That is why we today we launched the Saudi Project for Landmine Clearance, a $40 million programme in partnership on the ground with Yemen's national demining programme.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia also strongly condemns Houthi attacks against United Nations aid agencies and other humanitarian personnel since 2015. The Houthis have seized 19 humanitarian assistance ships carrying 200,000 tons of fuel, while also looting and destroying another 65 ships and numerous trucks carrying humanitarian assistance. The Houthis have also been planting mines and imposing fees in order to earn money for their military activities.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia highlights that the most severe deterioration of the humanitarian situation is to be found in the areas controlled by the Houthis, in particular in the vicinity of Al-Hudaydah, where, despite its proximity to the port, the people are being deprived of their most basic humanitarian rights. The Houthi militias have impeded access to humanitarian assistance so as to achieve their own political goals, to the detriment of the most vulnerable members of society. They are hampering humanitarian work and targeting populated areas, including humanitarian workers, while using children as human shields — an internationally prohibited crime. They are also using anti-aircraft weapons in civilian areas and targeting cities in the Kingdom of Saudi with ballistic missiles.

With regard to Syria, we pledged $100 million to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people at the Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region, held last April. We also contributed approximately $1 billion to support refugees in Syria and neighbouring countries. Moreover, we have hosted approximately 2.5 million Syrian citizens since the conflict began.

The report issued on 13 June by the Fact-finding Mission of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons confirmed the use of a toxic chemical as a weapon on 24 March 2017. My country strongly condemns that act, which is a heinous crime that requires a firm and clear response from the international community, led by the Security Council, so as to hold accountable those responsible.

In conclusion, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia once again underscores the importance of ending the tragic situation to which the Syrian people have been subjected. We will pursue our efforts to resolve the issue peaceably based on the first Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and pursuant to resolution 2254 (2015). The settlement of the crisis must be based on a Syrian consensus so as to realize the aspirations of the Syrian people, with the support of the Security Council.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Lebanon.

Ms. Mudallali (Lebanon): Let me begin by congratulating you, Sir, on a productive presidency this month and on the holding of this timely debate. In your concept note (S/2018/524, annex), Mr. President, you correctly invited us to consider the historical context of conflicts. I fully agree with you, as well as with Antonio's utterance in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* that what is past is prologue. I will explain.

One hundred years ago around this time in 1918, the Arabs put all their hopes in the Allied Forces, which were occupying one Arab city after another, from Jerusalem to Damascus, Aleppo to Beirut, while dismembering and carving up the Ottoman empire. The Arabs' hopes were for independence, freedom and unity. As we now know, promises were not kept, hopes were dashed, the Arabs felt betrayed, and their land was divided and distributed like an abandoned cake. Today, 100 years later, we are looking at history in the mirror and finding out that the wounds of the past 100 years have never healed. They just were added to the new wounds of a people who seem to be destined to live that history and cope with the seeds of conflicts that were planted a century ago.

Look at the Security Council's schedule for every month of the year. The Middle East, its people and their hopes and pains are in members' note books every month. Look at the news coming from the Middle East, which includes the occupation in Palestine and the fact that millions of Syrians, Yemenis, Iraqis and Libyans have become refugees or displaced in their own countries or scattered around the world. The Palestinian issue and the Arab-Israeli conflict remain for the Arabs the most important and protracted problem that has defied any solution. Following years of negotiations, dozens of United Nations resolutions, agreements and initiatives, and countless concessions on the Palestinian side, there is no horizon for peace today. Confidence

among the parties is at its lowest point ever, and the very cornerstone of a political solution — ending the occupation, international legitimacy and an independent state of Palestine based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital — is being eroded or completely abandoned. The Palestinians seem to have lost hope, but they continue to insist on their legitimate political and historic rights in Palestine, while stressing that those rights are the prerequisite for any peace in the region.

Lebanon is committed to the Arab Peace Initiative and to East Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Palestine because it knows that, only through a comprehensive and just settlement, can the region know real peace. With regard to other issues in the region, Lebanon is committed to preserving its stability, and there is consensus in the country on the importance of distancing Lebanon from Arab States' conflicts. The Lebanese Government upholds that dissociation as a cardinal tenet of its policy. The situation in southern Lebanon remains governed by relative stability and quiet thanks to the presence and vigilance of the Lebanese Armed Forces, but the quiet and Lebanese sovereignty are violated by Israel on a daily basis by land, air and sea. I repeat what we have said here before and in the numerous letters that we have sent to the Secretary-General and the Council: those Israeli violations are not conducive to peace. On the contrary they are inviting conflict.

Time and again, Lebanon has reaffirmed its commitment to resolution 1701 (2006) and the need for a permanent ceasefire, as well as its commitment to prevention and mediation to avoid any miscalculation or escalation that could lead to conflict. That is why Lebanon has called on the Secretary-General and the United Nations good offices and reiterates its firm belief that the tripartite mechanism is the appropriate forum in which to discuss and solve any issue and de-escalate any tension along the Blue Line in the south. Lebanon has also been at the forefront of combatting terrorism, and it is one of the few countries in the region that defeated Da'esh through the determined will of its armed forces and the help of its friends. But Lebanon also knows that defeating terrorism cannot happen only on the battlefield. It has to be done through providing young people with an education, job opportunities and hope.

It is high time that the major Powers see our region with different eyes from those of the past 100 years. The Middle East should not be seen mainly as an arena for competition over spheres of influence. It is time to view the people of the region as people with hopes and aspirations for a better and alternative future. To do so, the Council can take lessons from the past and address the problems of today differently. If the political will of the Council is coupled with collective leadership and armed with a new vision, then there is hope for the Middle East. The Security Council represents the will of the international community, and the whole array of tools at the United Nations disposal should be used. It can implement its resolutions to end occupation and oppression and fulfil the role with which it was entrusted upon its founding. The United Nations can use its international authority to usher in a new season to the Middle East — one of peace, reconciliation, healing, progress and development. The region has tremendous potential, if given the chance, not as a battlefield, but as a source of ideas, creativity and a place where peace can be born to circle the world.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Libya.

Mr. Elmajerbi (Libya) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, Sir, I would like to thank you for organizing this important debate on maintaining international peace and security, in particular in the Middle East and North Africa.

With the regard to the Middle East, the Palestinian question remains the core issue for the peoples of the Arab and Islamic world, and the Israeli occupation of Arab territories is the source of all crises in the Arab region. We believe that the only solution to the Palestinian question is the two-State one, in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative. We should also eliminate the settler plague, whose spread undermines the prospects for such a solution. The status of Jerusalem is important as well and should remain one of the final-status issues. It is important to refrain from any policies of fait accompli, such as the opening of embassies in Jerusalem, that violates the relevant Security Council resolutions. Reinvigorating the Quartet is now an imperative.

Regarding the questions raised in the concept note (S/2018/524, annex) on the causes of conflicts in the region, we believe that there are internal and external factors.

First, with respect to internal factors, there is a lack of a genuine development vision for the region that would meet the aspirations of its peoples and help

them emerge from the cycle of poverty. We should also reconsider the educational and cultural systems in the region, in line with the realities and the situation on the ground. Greater attention should be paid to the role of youth and women by engaging them at all stages of political and economic development, starting with planning and ending with implementation.

Secondly, external factors include interference in the internal affairs of sovereign States and the exploitation of a political vacuum in order to impose policies and visions aimed at reshaping the region in accordance with an opaque political narrative. There are also conflicting interests on the part of the major Powers as well as the imposition of certain perspectives on governance, the rule of law and human rights. There has also been a transfer of the domestic crises of major Powers to the region, such as illegal migration and financial crises.

Why does the policy of taking unilateral steps prevail over that of collective measures approved by the United Nations? We believe that the concept of a unified vision on the part of the international Community is a double-edged sword, as some are calling for a reshaping of the concept of nation States on the basis of flawed logic. These efforts are doomed to failure.

Terrorism and the combat against its financing relate to the first question. I spoke earlier about reshaping and revisiting the educational and cultural system, as we all know that the scourge of terrorism starts with an ideology propagated by certain political or religious leaders, as well as media that is financed to that end. Of course, such ideas belong to those who put them forward, but some States may provide funding, training, political cover and political justification in order to exploit such ideologies and groups.

Regarding the issue of peaceful coexistence, we believe that there are two reasons for the failure to achieve it. First, internal reasons: there has been no genuine political vision that would enable the countries of the region to integrate all socioeconomic issues. There is, of course, some coexistence, but at the same time narrow interests are being pursued at the expense of national identities. The second reason is an external one. Marginalization and non-integration are being exploited, and some are fuelling tribal strife in order to tear apart the nation to serve their own ends.

We must avoid any escalation of the conflicts in the region on a religious or political basis. The exploitation of religions and its use by political parties is very dangerous, and history is witness to the seriousness of such an undertaking. When a politician wages war, he knows full well the danger. If we enter an era of religious wars, we will not be spared the consequences. All parties think that they have a divine mandate and that killing the other will bring them closer to God. No one will be able to stop such bloodshed and insanity except those who propagated such ideas.

The concept note also addresses the issue of the Security Council sanctions regime and the need to review it comprehensively. In this respect, the sanctions imposed on Libya in terms of an asset freeze was not a punishment but aimed at protecting the funds in question. We have called on the Security Council more than once to revisit this regime in order to enable State institutions to manage these assets, which are now being dissipated, for many reasons. But the Security Council has not taken any serious steps to address this issue. We call for support for our appeal to carry out a comprehensive review of the sanctions regime, especially given the fact that from time to time we witness attempts by some States, under various pretexts, to control frozen Libyan assets. I wish to put on record here our rejection of any attempt by any State to control Libyan assets.

In closing, despite of the fact that the concept note addresses the situation and the crises in the Middle East and North Africa, we would have hoped to see two other elements put forward: the role of the media in fuelling conflict and that of civil-society organizations that are funded and play a role in covering and supporting terrorism.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of the Holy See to the United Nations.

Archbishop Auza (Holy See): The Holy See thanks the presidency of the Russian Federation for having convened this debate on the situation in the Middle East and North Africa, which are witnessing an unprecedented series of conflicts and crises, bringing death to thousands and inflicting untold suffering on millions of civilians, as well as provoking a cascade of challenges and crises beyond the region.

The Holy See wishes to avail itself of this occasion above all to urge the Security Council to throw the full weight of the authority and powers that the United Nations Charter has vested in it to find and agree

on enduring political solutions to the conflicts in the region.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a prime example in which decisive action by the Security Council and the international community is needed to prevent further degeneration of the situation. The Holy See continues to support a two-State solution that would achieve peaceful coexistence between a viable Palestinian State and Israel, with secure and recognized borders. The two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the only viable peace plan that would allow both nations to live side by side in peace. Yet the facts on the ground seem to indicate that there is more determination to tear apart peace plans than to foster them. Leaders on both sides bear the heaviest responsibility in guiding their people in the direction of peace and not of deeper conflict.

The Council must act to protect the two-State solution, thereby decisively supporting the birth of an independent Palestinian State and assuring the State of Israel of its full right to peace and security. The Holy See calls on both Israel and Palestine to demonstrate wisdom, responsibility and the political will needed to reach a historic peace agreement that would meet the legitimate aspirations of both peoples.

With regard to the Holy City of Jerusalem, which unquestionably holds a very special place not only in the hearts of its inhabitants but also in those of the followers of the three monotheistic religions all over the world, my delegation wishes to recall the obligation of all nations to respect the historical status quo of the Holy City in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions. The Holy See also reiterates its belief that the safeguarding of the identity and significance of the Holy City can be ensured by way of an internationally guaranteed statute aimed at a future of peace and reconciliation for the entire region.

We are witnessing a deteriorating humanitarian crisis in the Middle East and North Africa and a failure to achieve any political progress. Similarly, the exodus of refugees from Syria, Libya and other troubled areas in the region has brought political problems and provoked populist sentiments and outbursts of xenophobia in many host countries around the world. The rule of law is fundamental to any political solution of these conflicts and to the achievement and maintenance of harmonious coexistence among individuals, communities and nations in the region. It necessarily includes respect for religious freedom and equality before the law based on the principle of citizenship, regardless of race, ethnic origin or religion. The countries concerned must play their part in fostering a culture of the rule of law in the region.

The Holy See believes that there is an evident and inherent link between respect for human rights and international humanitarian law, on the one hand, and the maintenance of international peace and security, on the other. Respecting and protecting human rights, especially those of minority populations, contributes to our efforts to address the root causes and drivers of instability, thereby helping to prevent and resolve conflicts and sustain peace and favour development. An early response to violations of international humanitarian law, as well as to violations and abuses of human rights, can effectively prevent conflicts before they become a threat to regional and international peace and security. When conflicts do occur, accountability for such violations is vital for both justice and reconciliation.

In the past, the Council has shown unity in the face of threats to international peace and security. It needs to show once again that same determination and unity in the face of today's very grave threats. The world awaits its leadership and wants it to succeed in putting an end to the conflicts in the Middle East, North Africa and beyond.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Morocco.

Mr. Kadiri (Morocco) (*spoke in French*): Allow me to begin by thanking you, Mr. President, for inviting my country to take part in this very important debate. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his very instructive briefing this morning. The subject of today's debate has become a source of growing concern for the international community, given the impasse in the Middle East peace process and the outbreak of new conflicts, which are proving very difficult for the international community to resolve. Overcoming these multidimensional challenges demands coordinated and resolute action by the international community, particularly the Security Council, at regional and global levels.

The quest for a solution to the Palestinian issue, which remains a core issue for the Middle East, must be a priority for the international community, which has to uphold its full responsibilities in the area. Nevertheless,

it must be acknowledged that the halt in negotiations since 2014, along with the ongoing colonizing settlement policy, the confiscation of land, the closing of border crossing points, blockades and the judaization of the Holy City, in disregard for international law and Security Council resolutions, as well as the increasing relapses into violence, as testified to in the recent escalation of violence at the cost of the lives of innocent civilians, are not helping to bring about a two-State solution, with Israelis and Palestinians living side by side in peace and security within the 1967 borders.

In his capacity as Chair of the Al-Quds Committee of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, His Majesty King Mohammed VI is making every effort to defend the Palestinian issue in general and that of Al-Quds Al-Sharif in particular. He continues to underscore that settling the Palestinian issue requires preserving the legal, historic and geographic nature of that Holy City, which is part of the Palestinian territory occupied in 1967, in accordance with international law and the relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolutions 478 (1980) and 2334 (2016). The Kingdom of Morocco supports a two-State solution with East Jerusalem as the capital of the Palestinian State, within the borders of 4 June 1967 and in accordance with international agreements, the Arab Peace Initiative, the Quartet road map and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

The Kingdom of Morocco attaches great importance to the situation in Libya, a brother country with which it shares historic links and a common destiny as part of the Arab Maghreb Union, which was established under the Marrakesh Treaty in 1989. The Treaty calls for effective solidarity among the members of the Maghreb Union and encourages them to contribute to international peace and security. In accordance with its policies of good offices and the peaceful settlement of disputes, the Kingdom of Morocco organized peace talks in Skhirat between the Libyan factions and parties, under the auspices of the United Nations. That led to the Libyan Political Agreement on 17 December 2015, which is considered the basis for a peaceful settlement of the Libyan crisis and has received major support from the Security Council. Morocco has repeatedly supported the efforts of the United Nations and Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya Ghassan Salamé to find a negotiated consensus political solution among the Libyan parties, a position that was reaffirmed during Mr. Salamé's most recent visit to Morocco.

Morocco continues to play an active role internationally and regionally in contributing to resolving the situation in Libya, including through the participation of our Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Kingdom of Morocco in the Paris conference on 29 May. Furthermore, Morocco also stresses the importance of ensuring Libya's territorial integrity and non-interference in its internal affairs, in order to enable the Libyans themselves to arrive at a settlement. Morocco stands ready to offer the necessary assistance to ensure reconciliation among the Libyan parties, support the democratic process and provide Libyans with the necessary training and expertise to establish and run their own institutions.

Between 2014 and 2016, the scourge of terrorism in general and foreign terrorist fighters in particular expanded to an unprecedented degree into the Middle East, the Sahel-Sahara and the Maghreb, where several groups are active, particularly Al-Qaida, Da'esh and Boko Haram. In that regard, we welcome the Security Council's timely response aimed at suppressing such developments through its adoption of various resolutions, in particular resolution 2178 (2014), adopted at the high-level summit held in September 20[illegible] (see S/PV.7272), resolution 2253 (2015), aimed at cutting off terrorism's financial support, and resolution 23[illegible] (2017).

Morocco has been determined to be involved in all the regional and international efforts to fight this scourge. In that regard, we have hosted several meetings on border security, including the inaugural conference of the Border Security Initiative in El Jadida, in cooperation with the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre. We are also currently co-Chair, with the Netherlands, of the Global Counterterrorism Forum, which has adopted several memoranda on good practices, including The Hague-Marrakech Memorandum on Good Practices for a More Effective Response to the Foreign Terrorist Fighters Phenomenon. We have also developed a national strategy for fighting terrorism based on optimizing security governance by updating our counter-terrorism legal framework, combating social insecurity and promoting sustainable human development and introducing religious reforms, in particular by training the young imams who teach the principles of Islam. King Mohammed has launched initiatives to train male and female imams, including from our brother countries in Africa and Europe, by

providing them with religious teaching based on the values of dialogue, tolerance, moderation and respect for others.

In conclusion, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, once again for organizing today's debate. I can assure you, Sir, of Morocco's commitment to peace, security and development in our region and beyond.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Bahrain.

Mr. Alrowaiei (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to begin by congratulating the Russian delegation on its presidency and thanking the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation for presiding over this meeting. We support the convening of this open debate dedicated to the very important issue of the maintenance of international peace and security. I welcome the focus of your concept note (S/2018/524, annex), Mr. President, on the Middle East and North Africa, given the fact that the region is facing serious threats to its security and stability.

When His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa of Bahrain spoke at the Summit of the League of Arab States, he emphasized that the international community must play a greater role in ensuring respect for the resolutions on this subject and their implementation, and in creating an environment that is conducive to resolving the crises and conflicts in the Arab region. The international community must also play a greater role in imposing and implementing its resolutions and creating a positive environment that provides more opportunities in order to achieve political solutions to Arab and regional crises, end foreign interference and provide the necessary protection to affected peoples so as to facilitate the development of practical solutions that will allow those States to maintain their sovereignty, independence and security.

Stability and security in the Middle East and the entire world require a common political will and serious, concerted action from all parties, based on respect for the norms governing relations among States, in order to confront as one the greatest challenge facing us — terrorism — and stop all those who sponsor, finance and support it, be they individuals, States or other entities. Terrorism is not limited only to terrorist groups that we can combat and eradicate. It is a tool that is sometimes used by certain States to generate crises in targeted countries in the service of their own interests and agendas, thereby turning them into essential accomplices in terrorism and a destabilizing element that adversely affects international peace and security. We therefore cannot allow those States to play a part in settling the conflicts and ending the humanitarian crises that they have instigated. It is the international community's responsibility to confront those countries, demand accountability and prosecute them so as to achieve security and stability in the world.

Concerning the Palestinian people and their leadership, the Kingdom of Bahrain reaffirms its unwavering position. That is one of our top priorities. We underscore the need to achieve a just and comprehensive peace, with the goal of establishing an independent and sovereign Palestinian State within the 4 June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, based on the two-State solution and the Arab Peace Initiative, as well as the relevant international resolutions. We underscore that final status issues can be achieved only through negotiation between the Palestinians and Israelis and will never be resolved by unilateral decisions that run contrary to international resolutions and hinder the settlement of the crisis and achieving peace.

One of the main causes of the crises in the Middle East and North Africa is the intervention of certain countries, led by Iran, in the internal affairs of States by destabilizing them through their support of terrorist groups like Hizbullah. Cooperating with terrorists is a flagrant violation of international law. We see that demonstrated by the crisis in the brotherly country of Yemen, where thugs and militias supported and led by Iran carried out a coup d'état against the legitimate Government and violated its sovereignty and territorial integrity in a blatant violation of international law, while impeding any attempt to achieve a peaceful solution based on international initiatives, in particular the Initiative of the Gulf Cooperation Council, international dialogue and Security Council resolution 2216 (205). In that regard, we underscore the need to respect fully the unity, sovereignty and stability of Yemen and to reject any form of interference in its internal affairs. We emphasize the need to find a political solution and to support the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General. We are fully committed to participating in the Arab coalition to support the legitimate Government in Yemen. The port of Al-Hudaydah must also be liberated so as to end weapons trafficking benefiting militias,

including missiles threatening the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and other countries of the region.

Countries that are struggling to restore their stability and sovereignty and fighting against attempts to transform them into crisis zones are investing all their material and human resources in the quest for development and reconstruction, which entails an even greater responsibility on the part of the international community to end the actions of rogue States that, through their actions, have prolonged the suffering of world's youth and prevented them from achieving their aspirations.

In conclusion, the Kingdom of Bahrain underscores that the maintenance of international peace and security is the collective and individual responsibility of all, and that we have worked and will always work towards further strengthening our commitment to supporting the principles underlying that responsibility, including respect for the sovereignty of States and strengthening international partnerships based on tolerance and spreading the culture of peace. We will spare no effort to build on the accomplishments that we have already achieved, support our region and put it on the path to security and stability.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Iraq.

Mr. Bahr Aluloom (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, allow me to congratulate the Russian Federation on its accession to the presidency of the Security Council for this month, and to thank it for convening this very important meeting to share our points of view with regard to international peace and security in the Middle East and North Africa. We welcome the presence of the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation to preside over this meeting. Let me also thank the Secretary-General for his briefing, which analysed the realities of the region. We also extend our heartfelt thanks to Poland for its work during its presidency of the Council in May.

The best way to ensure lasting peace, tolerance and the prevention of conflicts is to ensure sustainable development, equal opportunities and the equitable distribution of national wealth, inclusive of everyone irrespective of ethnicity, religion or gender. We believe that, in order to promote peaceful and open societies, secured on a solid foundation and in accordance with Sustainable Development Goal 16 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Members States must respect the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and those governing international law, which prohibit interference in the internal affairs of other States, which promotes ethnic, religious and community divisions, thereby entailing national destabilization and the outbreak of conflicts that only lead to the destruction, ruin and demise of the local communities and the developmental gains that were achieved by them. Those conflicts are also destroying the development progress made by some countries in recent years, despite ongoing wars. In addition, we believe that the equitable distribution of international water resources among coastal States around a shared body of water prevents crises because injustice resulting from water quotas undermines sustainable development in countries sharing any body of water, which is a matter of water law and human rights law.

The Middle East has always been one of the regions most exposed to political, security, economic and strategic upheavals. We are concerned about the harmful impact of the presence of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East because they constitute a strategic threat to regional and international peace and security. In every international forum, Iraq has therefore called for the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East. We have also called for the implementation of the comprehensive safeguards agreement of the International Atomic Energy Agency in all of the countries of the region. We have therefore committed to strengthening the international weapon-of-mass-destruction disarmament and non-proliferation regime. We try to be a force of stability both regionally and internationally, far from all tension and instability in the world. The Government of Iraq is committed to respecting its obligations under international treaties and conventions on disarmament and non-proliferation based on the provisions of the permanent Constitution of the Republic of Iraq.

The Israeli occupation is the cause of tension in the Middle East. The security and stability of the Middle East depend on finding a just solution that takes into consideration the Palestinian people's legitimate right to freedom. It also hinges on the creation of an independent Palestinian State with June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. Moreover, we must take the necessary measures to mitigate the risk of its flaming religious sentiments, which could transform a political conflict on the ground into an endless religious war. That is what the extremists want, as it would

exacerbate violence, terrorism and extremism in the region and throughout the world. We urge everyone to act responsibly and make efforts to reach a just solution to the Palestinian issue and to put an end to the Israeli occupation, while ensuring the full withdrawal of the Israeli occupation from all occupied Arab territories.

Iraq is committed to the stability and territorial integrity of Syria. That requires a balanced and peaceful inter-Syrian solution that is accepted by the Syrian Government and all the parties concerned. The question of security and stability in Syria is very important and it is inextricably linked with the security and stability of Iraq, as the Da'esh terrorist organization operates in the region between Syria and Iraq. That means that the fight against the Da'esh terrorists is a common goal of all countries that are combating terrorism. That fight is of strategic importance for the entire world, especially countries of the region.

In addition, Iraq supports a peaceful solution in Yemen. We call for a national dialogue with a view to safeguarding the rights of the Yemeni people and putting an end to the carnage in order to restore security and stability to Yemen.

We reaffirm that it is critical to reach a comprehensive political solution to the Libyan crisis and to respect the Libyan Political Agreement, which is the only political framework to resolve the political crisis in Libya, in order to achieve stability and prosperity in Libya.

The spread of takfiri ideology in the Middle East has led to the emergence of terrorist groups such as Da'esh, Al-Qaida and other associated groups, which have sown the seeds of sectarianism and division and committed atrocious crimes against all segments of the Iraqi population. They have also pillaged monuments and destroyed cultural heritage in Iraq. We are counting on the international investigation team established pursuant to resolution 2379 (2017) to hold the Da'esh criminals accountable and to ensure justice for the victims.

My Government works to strengthen cooperation with international bodies and organizations in order to ensure aid to the Iraqi people, who have confronted the most powerful terrorist group in the world with the help of the Global Coalition against Da'esh. We would like to thank friendly countries that have helped us regain control of our territory. I would like to reaffirm that my country's Government is taking all the necessary measures to ensure the definitive return of displaced persons in order to revitalize the economy and bring back the social life of former times, to ensure development and to restore stability throughout the country, while attracting investment. We will abide by the Constitution of Iraq in the settlement of all problems and act in the best interests of the people of Iraq. We are committed to protecting the federal system of Iraq, its unity and its territorial integrity.

The Council must make efforts to peaceably settle conflicts, including through arbitration and mediation. It must also play an important role in supporting international law in order to achieve international peace and security, especially international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of the United Arab Emirates.

Mrs. Nusseibeh (United Arab Emirates): I thank Russia for its successful stewardship of the Security Council this month and, equally important, of the World Cup. As part of your presidency, Sir, we applaud your commitment to discussing the root causes of conflict plaguing the Middle East and North Africa. Russia has been a historic partner in our region and committed to addressing the fundamental issue underlying many of our challenges — terrorism and its bedfellow, extremist thought and ideology.

At the outset, let me say that the positions of the United Arab Emirates on regional matters are known. In response to Russia's call for us to be action-oriented in our intervention, I would like to offer ideas for an integrated approach to addressing each of the regional conflicts that are causing instability in our region. What is clear is that diplomacy has failed in the Middle East, yet diplomacy will always be key to solving the region's crises, and therefore we must renew our efforts to see it strengthened.

There have been calls today for new initiatives akin to the Helsinki process of 1975, to build confidence and resolve tensions in the region. The United Arab Emirates welcomes any substantive dialogue that contributes to building confidence among regional States. First, however, as was the case at the end of the Cold War, we must all recommit to the central principles and concepts that drove the creation of the current world order. Until that common understanding is accepted by all, we will condemn ourselves to a continuous cycle of violence in our region and beyond our borders.

For any such dialogue to be meaningful, all actors must accept the principles of the Charter of the United Nations. As is raised in the concept note (S/2018/524, annex), Iran in particular has consistently violated those norms and must end its irresponsible presence in Arab countries in the form of militias and terrorist groups. As the representative of the United States said today,

> "In war zone after war zone and terrorist act after terrorist act, we find Iran and Hizbullah at the root of violence in the Middle East."

To counter extremist ideology, which is spreading like a cancer in our region, we call on Member States to lend their support to like-minded countries of the moderate Arab centre that are shifting the Middle East towards stability, development and the rejection of any State system based on extremist ideology.

Furthermore, while we understand the need to partner with external actors, lasting regional security cannot be decided from afar. True stability in the Middle East will require Arab decision-making and leadership. We must not repeat the mistakes of the great Powers after the First World War, which believed that they knew better than the people of the region, who have been suffering some of the consequences of that approach for more than a century now. That way of thinking must end as the region steps up to shoulder its own responsibilities for its own future. The era of hegemony and great-Power politics must be replaced by a renewed respect for the twentieth-century nation-State system that we believe can still meet the needs of the twenty-first century. For that vision to materialize, the Security Council must play its part as a neutral steward of peace and security and avoid a slide into irrelevance.

As other speakers have noted, a historical understanding of the context must form the basis of our future policymaking. Let us start with Yemen, where a picture has been painted by some of a nation plunged into chaos as a result of the intervention of the Arab coalition to support legitimacy in Yemen. Some have forgotten that, as recently as four years ago, the legitimate Yemeni Government headed a functional State and had a clear process for political transition. The Council should have taken decisive action when the Houthis took Sana'a in September 2014, which caused the breakdown of the Yemeni State apparatus and the resulting descent into civil war. If the coalition had not entered at the request of the legitimate Government and in accordance with resolution 2216 (2015), today we would be dealing with a lawless State dominated by an illegal militia that represent only 3 per cent of the population but seek to control the fate of 27 million Yemenis.

In Syria, as the brutal war enters its eighth year, in our view a prominent Arab role is essential to resolving the conflict. With all due respect to the Powers that are deciding the fate of the Syrian people today, Syria is an Arab nation and its future lies in an Arab regional solution with the support of the international community and the United Nations. Along with the negative ones, there are positive trends in our region. For example, with regard to Iraq, we join others in applauding the defeat of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, and we congratulate the Iraqi people on the success of their recent parliamentary elections. The United Arab Emirates looks forward to a renewed Iraqi role in the Arab political scene.

However, we cannot hope to address new conflicts without resolving older ones. The call for a Palestinian State will remain a rallying cry for proponents of extremist ideologies. Until the rights of the Palestinians are met, the issue will remain one of the root causes of regional instability and will prevent Israel from having a secure place in our region.

Finally, diplomacy in our region will not thrive unless we restore the deficit of trust that exists. To do that, we need honest and transparent partners and the collective vision of our shared security. More than a year ago, we took diplomatic measures against the State of Qatar because we could no longer tolerate its policies and support for the terrorist groups that undermine stability in our region and throughout the world. The new Arab centre of which I spoke will go from strength to strength, as our model speaks to the hearts and minds of the millions of Arabs who want a future based on optimism rather than nihilism. We will always be an inclusive group for those that reject extremist ideology in all its forms and seek to partner peacefully in a positive and moderate vision for our region.

The United Arab Emirates and its allies are actively working to stabilize our region and to advance its development. Bellwethers for thriving societies are the protection of the rights of minorities and the celebration of diversity, ethnicity and creed. Building and maintaining strong institutions are key to that. The unrest of the past seven years is largely the result of an institutional trust deficit across the region, which saw

simmering discontent boil over in the collapse of the social contract between people and Government.

By contrast, the focus and commitment of the United Arab Emirates to the strength of its own institutions, based on inclusiveness, transparency and good governance, have produced strong social trust. We must therefore renew our efforts for institution-building across our region and replenish the trust deficit that is shaking its very core. We stand ready to facilitate new strategies to address the multitude of crises in our region. We seek partnerships with both historical friends and new ones so as to advance those efforts. We ask only that our partners respect our equal voice at the table in deciding our own collective future. An optimistic and forward-looking model for the region is critical to our collective success. We should not focus solely on a future that we do not want. Instead, we must begin to envision where we want to go and what will be required to reach that destination.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Agshin Mehdiyev, Permanent Observer of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation to the United Nations, and Mr. Gerton Van Den Akker, representative of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation to the United Nations.

Mr. Mehdiyev: Let me begin by offering my sincere appreciation to the Government of the Russian Federation for convening this important meeting. I am confident that our deliberations today will help to refine our response to the challenges of peace and security at the global, regional and national levels.

The crises engulfing the Middle East and North Africa region are undoubtedly the most difficult and challenging as compared to any other similar contemporary situation. As we have seen over the years, the challenges are numerous but those that effectively engulf all positive efforts are when the Powers that be in the global political system tend to be partial and partisan, when crimes against humanity and the blatant violation and mockery of internal laws go unchallenged, when a party acts with extreme impunity and arrogance merely on the basis of its military muscle, and, last but not the least, when neighbours act in an unfair way through proxies and work as spoilers.

The parties can continue to engage in blame games and to hold each other responsible for the failures. However, the fact of matter is that one cannot expect the weaker party to remain docile and passive in the face of the continuous onslaught of atrocities, aggression, occupation, desecration of religious sites, invasion of territory, violation of United Nations resolutions and so on.

Rightly, that is the situation of the Palestinians, the crimes of the Israeli Government and the state and fate of the mediation process. In talking about how to make it work and to ensure sustainability, the following are imperative. Israel should immediately stop occupying Palestinian lands and building new housing. The blatant violation of human and international laws must stop. The blockade of Palestinian territories must end. The international community must remain impartial and non-partisan. The very reason for the establishment of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) was no other than the Palestine issue. Ever since, we have seen the crises and the attempts to resolve the dispute going through different ups and downs.

If I may stretch it to that extent, the crises in the region are no less complicated. They say that those who do not learn history are doomed to repeat it. That is precisely how everyone has acted with regard to the other countries in the region. The colonial intervention in Palestine led to what we see there today. Similarly, the foreign interventions and proxy wars have played havoc in the region at an unprecedented level. There is a need to pause and take stock of the aggravating situations. The resolution of conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa region requires sincerity, impartiality and commitment. Mediation cannot be dictation. It cannot be ignorance of the facts and of history. It cannot be the denial of rights.

Apart from the threat that the long-standing and unresolved conflicts, mainly located in the Muslim world, continue to pose to the peace and security of our societies, new tensions and conflicts with cultural and religious dimensions have also recently emerged to challenge our collective efforts to build a better world that is founded on moderation, understanding and harmony. Prejudices and misunderstanding among cultures and civilizations increasingly fuel the extremist discourse across the divide. The perilous currents of Islamophobia, xenophobia and racism, as well as sectarianism, clearly have the potential to endanger the peace, security and well-being of present

and future generations unless priority is given to dialogue and mediation.

As the OIC also grapples with tensions from within and outside its area, priority is also focused on the surge of violent extremism, terrorism and radicalization, escalating tensions between some States and the ongoing conflict situations in various OIC regions through a new peace and security architecture to resolve conflicts, using the tools of mediation, the good offices of the Secretary-General and a proactive and quiet diplomacy, as well as the mechanism of the Executive Committee provided for in chapter XV of the OIC Charter.

One of the greatest threats militating against our efforts to address intolerance and hatred on the basis of religious beliefs and cultural identity is the growing scourge of defamation and the vilification of Islam and Muslims in parts of the world, particularly in the West.

I shall reiterate OIC's offer of an effective partnership among all stakeholders in promoting peace and a world of hope, dignity and justice. As the second largest intergovernmental organization after the United Nations, with 57 member States spread across four continents, the OIC, the collective voice of the Muslim world, has the responsibility, in accordance with its charter, to safeguard and protect the interests of its member States within the spirit of promoting peace and harmony among the various peoples of the global community.

In that context, the OIC maintains cooperative relations with the United Nations and other regional and subregional bodies. Over the years since its creation in 1969, it has also developed a strategic partnership with such bodies, in particular the United Nations, to protect the vital interests of the Muslim world, to work towards the peaceful settlement of disputes, and to ease heightening tensions that could undermine international peace and security. It therefore remains steadfastly committed to preventing hate and inflammatory rhetoric that, if left unchecked, could disrupt our global order and cause a religious conflagration with catastrophic consequences.

We would like to underscore the importance of the following points: developing the necessary political within the international community to resolve long-standing conflicts, including the Arab-Israeli conflict, which has continued to have a negative impact on global peace and security; adopting a new paradigm based on a dialogue-based culture of peace and security that focuses more on early warning and pre-emptive responses to avert conflicts, while de-emphasizing long and wasteful conflict management; enhancing governance, including by ensuring that Member States address the root causes of conflicts, while strengthening their mediation capacity and capabilities; establishing a network of United Nations-OIC mediators, experts, think thanks, civil society groups, including the Group of Friends of OIC Mediation; mobilizing and allocating sustained funding to OIC mediation activities; promoting a more culturally and religiously sensitive mediation approach for sustainable global peace; enhancing the United Nations Alliance of Civilization and formally recognizing islamophobia as a threat to global peace and security, adopting appropriate counter measures through Human Rights Council resolution 16/18 and the Istanbul process and enhancing the use of the Secretary-General's good offices in mediation and conflict resolution.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the observer of the European Union.

Mr. Van Den Akker (European Union): I am pleased to speak on behalf of the European Union and its member States.

The European Union (EU) ensures that the Middle East peace process remains high on its political agenda at a time when the region faces many other challenges. The European Union remains fully committed to its known positions on the parameters for a two-State solution and to the importance of avoiding steps that erode the viability of the two-State solution, as laid down in the Quartet report of July 2016, including in particular continued Israeli settlement activity, which is illegal under international law and remains an obstacle to peace, as reaffirmed by resolution 2334 (2016), and acts of incitement and violence.

We are deeply alarmed about the sharp escalation of violence we witnessed most recently in Gaza, which left a large number of Palestinians dead and injured. We underscore the absolute urgency of addressing the gravity of the humanitarian situation in Gaza and express our firm support to the efforts of United Nations Special Coordinator Mladenov in that regard. Israel must respect the right to peaceful protest and ensure the use of proportional measures when protecting its legitimate security interests. We urge all parties to take immediate steps to de-escalate the situation and

to act with utmost restraint to avoid further loss of life. Israeli security forces must refrain from the excessive use of force against unarmed civilians. The lethal use of force should be exercised with maximum restraint and only as a last resort to protect life. Those leading the protests in Gaza, including Hamas and other groups, have a responsibility to avoid provocations and ensure that they remain strictly non-violent. We condemn the firing of rockets from Gaza into Israel.

We underscore the EU's clear, consolidated position on Jerusalem as a final status issue and will continue to respect the international consensus on Jerusalem embodied in, inter alia, resolution 478 (1980), including on the diplomatic representations until the final status of Jerusalem is resolved.

The European Union remains deeply concerned about the recent significant reductions of funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). In an already unstable region UNRWA must remain able to carry out its important function.

The Syrian conflict has entered its eighth year of continuous and widespread violence, brutal violation of international law, as well as the repeated use of chemical weapons by the regime and Da'esh. The Syrian regime bears the overwhelming responsibility for that situation. The continued deliberate denial and obstruction of humanitarian access to those in need must stop. Unhindered, safe and sustainable humanitarian access must be implemented, as called for most recently in resolution 2401 (2018). The EU deplores the repeated violations of the so-called de-escalation areas and urges the Astana guarantors, Russia, Iran and Turkey, to ensure a complete and durable cessation of hostilities throughout the whole Syrian territory. The Syrian regime and its allies have started an offensive in the region of Dar'a, in south-western Syria, in a de-escalation zone that the Astana guarantors committed to safeguarding. All necessary measures to protect civilian lives, as well as unhindered, safe and sustainable humanitarian access must be ensured.

The EU reiterates its strong condemnation of the repeated use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime and by Da'esh as confirmed by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM). The EU reiterates the strong need for accountability in Syria for all war crimes committed and in particular for the use of chemical weapons. The use of such weapons is a war crime and crime against humanity. In that respect, the EU urges the Security Council to rapidly re-establish an independent attribution mechanism to ensure accountability for perpetrators of chemical weapons attacks. In that regard, the EU regrets the Russian vetoes of the renewal of the JIM mandate in November 2017.

The EU reiterates that Syria needs a political solution and a political transition in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and the 2012 Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex), negotiated by the Syrian parties within the United Nations-led Geneva process. We commend the efforts of Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura and call for the swift establishment of the constitutional committee, including the full and effective participation of women without further delay.

The EU reaffirms its extreme concern about the continuing deterioration of the situation in Yemen. The EU is seriously concerned about the recent intensification of the military operations in and around the city of Hodeidah, including the impact of the military operations by the coalition on the civilian population. The EU reiterates its strong condemnation of attacks against civilians, urges all parties to the conflict to ensure the protection of civilians and fully respect international humanitarian law, including by providing unimpeded humanitarian access and safe passage for those who wish to escape the fighting. The EU also calls on all parties to ensure the full and effective functioning of Al-Hudaydah port as the lifeline for humanitarian support and commercial access point for essential supplies.

The EU expresses its concern about the fact that the most recent developments risk undermining United Nations-led efforts to resume negotiations towards a political solution of the conflict and welcomes the Organization's determination, as expressed by Mr. Martin Griffiths, to move ahead with the political process.

The EU condemns the launch of ballistic missiles by the Houthis against the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, including at civilian targets, and against vessels transiting through the Bab Al-Mandab Strait. The EU expresses grave concerns about the proliferation of ballistic missiles and technology in the region as such actions feed regional tensions.

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) is a key element of the global nuclear non-proliferation

architecture, enshrined in resolution 2231 (2015) and is essential to the security of the region and beyond. It has been working and is delivering on its goal. As long as Iran implements its nuclear-related commitments, the EU will remain firmly committed to the continued full and effective implementation of the JCPOA. The EU deeply regrets the decision of the President of the United States to withdraw from the JCPOA. While the EU expresses its concerns related to ballistic missiles and increasing tensions in the region, it reiterates the need to address them outside the JCPOA in the relevant formats and forums.

Finally, with respect to Libya, the EU remains fully committed to an inclusive inter-Libyan political process, and we express full support to Special Representative of the Secretary-General Salamé's efforts to achieve a political settlement and ensure that elections take place by the end of 2018, once the proper conditions are in place, as outlined in Special Representative Salamé's statement to the Council on 21 May (see S/PV.8263) and in line with the 6 June presidential statement of the Security Council (S/PRST/2018/11), which welcomed the momentum generated by the international conference on Libya, which took place in Paris on 29 May.

The EU remains the main provider of humanitarian aid and cooperation in Libya. Together with the Libyan authorities, the United Nations and the African Union, it is also committed to setting up a more efficient system to manage migration, in particular to improve migrants' living conditions in Libya and ensure they can be repatriated should they wish to be, while meeting international humanitarian standards.

Lastly, the EU has deployed a military mission and a civilian mission to provide further assistance to Libya. The EU will sustain its engagement in Libya and continue to do its utmost to contribute to its stabilization and national reconciliation.

The meeting rose at 4.50 p.m.